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LADY LEE'S WIDOWHOOD.



SADY LEE'S WIDOWHOOD

Vol. II.



The Mine Field

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NEW YORK & SAN FRANCISCO.

1854.

LADY LEE'S WIDOWHOOD

BY

EDWARD BRUCE HAMLEY

CAPTAIN R.A.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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LADY LEE'S WIDOWHOOD.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Smith 18 Aug 50
“I’LL tell you what, my boy,” said Bagot to Seager, “money must be had. Besides what I owe you, just look at these pleasant communications that the post brought me. That blackguard tailor refuses to supply me till his account’s settled—boot-maker, £75—hotel bill, in town, £60—(threatens me, this fellow),—and I owe Tindal two or three hundred. Besides, I must have a little tin to go on with, for I am running precious short.”

“Try her ladyship,” said Seager, who was smoking a cigar.

“I’d see her—(&c. &c.)—first,” quoth Bagot.
“Gad, sir, I hate that girl worse every day. She gets

loftier and more sarcastic every time I see her ; and if I could bring her down a peg or two, I would with all my heart ; but I wouldn't take sixpence from her if I was starving."

"There I entirely differ from you," returned Seager. "That's the very reason I'd get all I could out of her. I'd put my pride in my pocket : however, every man to his taste. You don't know any little boy in the neighbourhood that's beginning with the smallpox or typhus fever, do you ?"

"Why so ?" inquired the Colonel.

"Why, you might bring him up here to play with the young baronet," said Mr Seager.

"Oh, curse your foolery !" returned Bagot. "If you can't talk sense, we'll drop the subject."

"You're a peppery old beggar," rejoined Mr Seager, who had a pleasant way of charging his intimates with mendicancy. "You're not the brightest fellow I know at taking a joke. But, seriously, if the little chap would take himself out of the way in a decent manner, 'twould be a deuced fine thing for you. Sir Bagot, you know ; and, how much a-year is it ?"

"I must try Dubbley again," said Bagot, gnawing his nails—"deuced soon, too, after the last five hundred. He'll kick, I know he will ; but my float tells me he's been nibbling, and I must hook him before he breaks his hold."

"You've a splendid game on the balls," said Seager, rising in his excitement, and standing on the hearth-rug, with his cut-away coat-tails hanging through his arms, and his back against the chimney-piece. "A splendid game, if you only knew how to play it—and leave yourself safe too."

The Colonel's bloodshot eye turned half inquiringly, half dubiously upon him, as if he wasn't quite sure whether this wouldn't turn out to be another of Mr Seager's playful jokes.

"That fellow Sloperton's here every day," said Seager, knocking off the long grey ash of his cigar against the corner of the chimney-piece. "Why shouldn't he bleed as well as Dubbley?"

"But he's not such a fool as Dubbley," said Bagot. "Puppy he is, but no fool; on the contrary, sharp enough about money. Besides, I couldn't borrow from him with any face."

"Who wants you to borrow from him?" returned Seager; "you shall give him value. You see, I've already put matters in training, by telling him that nothing was to be done with Lady Lee without your consent. Now, suppose I go to him and talk in this way: You're a man of the world, Sloperton, says I, and therefore I'll talk plainly with you. Everybody sees that you and her ladyship are fond of one another—excuse me, you know, for plain speaking, but

no offence. Well, the Colonel sees it as well as the rest, and likes the idea uncommonly ; for, between you and me, he's deuced fond of you. But what can the Colonel do ? He's deuced hard up, as all the world knows. Here are two or three rich fellows in love with the lady, trying to buy his consent from him ; and, you know, a man may be deuced honourable, and virtuous, and all that, and yet, when the duns come in, and he's got no money to pay 'em, why, what *can* he do ? I ask you as a man of the world. Very well, upon this Sloperton asks me what I am driving at ? I say directly, Bid for the consent, and you'll get it, for you're the favourite."

"But suppose he should think his chance with Hester a bad one," urged Bagot ; "and, 'pon my life, I don't think he's got the ghost of one."

"Trust his vanity for that," returned Seager. "Between what I shall say to him, and what you shall get that devil of a girl—what's her name ? Kitty—to put in his head—and his own conceit, I'll engage he shall feel quite sure of success before dinner-time."

"Well, there's no harm in trying," said Bagot, "and I shall be greatly obliged to you, old fellow. You see, it isn't a thing I could very well do myself."

Certainly not," agreed Seager ; "that would

look very fishy. But as to being obliged to me, nothing of the sort ; perhaps I shall have to ask the same service of you."

After a little more discussion, the increasing brightness of this project beginning to shed more and more light upon poor Bagot's dreary circumstances, he went off to give Miss Fillett her instructions with regard to Sloperton ; after which, he purposed paying a visit to Mr Dubbley, without delay, for purposes of assessment.

" While I'm away," said Bagot, " you can tackle Sloperton, who'll be here to-day, in the billiard-room or stable, or anywhere you can catch him by himself ; and I shall be out of the way all the morning."

Seager nodded, and applied himself to another cigar, while Bagot went to talk to Kitty.

Now Kitty, as already hinted, had, after the interview with the Squire last chronicled, conceived an ambitious idea—an idea altogether traitorous to Bagot. She had not failed to notice the admiration with which she had inspired the Squire ; popular report had made her acquainted with the weakness and inconstancy of that gentleman's heart ; and she had enough confidence in her own wiles and attractions to think she could secure it.

Instead, therefore, of artfully keeping the Squire's

passion for her ladyship at a proper temperature, by judiciously applying or withholding encouragement, she had proceeded as fast as possible to reduce it to zero, merely leaving so much doubt about his prospect of success as would cause him to continue his interviews with herself. And during these interviews Kitty was so lavish of her wiles, so adroit with her flatteries, and so resolute in refusing to allow his advances and gallant attempts at small caresses, that she was gradually tormenting him into a strong fancy for her.

"Bless you, sir," said Kitty to the Squire, in pursuance of her designs—"bless you, sir, my lady can't do anythink without me. It was only this morning she says, 'Kitty,' she says, 'what do you say? Shall it be matrimony or not?' 'My lady,' says I, 'there's a good deal to be said of both sides.' 'Well,' says she, 'Fillett, you never spoke a truer word; but with regard to the matrimony side, now, what's your candied opinion?' 'Your ladyship knows,' says I, 'what I've said, over and over, about the Squire. He would be the man for my money.'"

"Did you say that?" said the Squire. "'Pon my life, you're the best girl I ever knew. She must be uncommon fond of you to consult you in that way."

"Fond!" said Kitty. "Ho! well she may be!

What could she do without me at her elbow, I wonder ! If I was a missenary person, Mr Dubbley" (Fillet did not mean a missionary, but a mercenary person), "I might raise my celery ever so high, by constantly giving warning, and being bribed to come back."

"Well," said the Squire, "and what answer did she make when you said that about me?"

"She didn't make answer immediate," returned Kitty. "She leaned her head upon her knuckles jubiously, and then she said, 'No, Kitty, no, he's not the man for my money ; and I'll tell you for why. I've noticed,' she says, 'that the man's got a will of his own, and that's a thing I never was accustomed to, and, what's more, I never shall be. No man,' says she, 'if he was fifty husbands, should ever set his shoe on my neck.'"

"God bless me !" exclaimed the Squire, secretly a little flattered at the imputation of imperiousness ; "who could have put that in her head ? I'm sure I've always been as quiet as a lamb to her. If I am a little fond of my own way, I'm sure I never showed it to her."

"As I said," resumed Kitty—"as I said to her, 'What's a man who hasn't a will of his own, my lady ? I'd as soon have a barber's dummy for a husband, as a man who couldn't take care of him-

self and me too.' But 'twas no good, Mr Dubbley ; she's got the fancy into her head, and all parliament wouldn't persuade her to the contrary."

Although the reader may perhaps think that Kitty's dramatic renderings of the sentiments and conversational manner of Lady Lee were not remarkable for truthfulness, yet the Squire never doubted her in the least ; for the poor Squire, with all his cunning, was terribly deficient in sagacity. Accordingly, at each interview with Miss Fillett, Lady Lee's image receded farther and farther from the poor Squire, till it was now quite lost in the mists raised by her faithful handmaiden.

If Bagot had been aware of this, he would, probably, not have given himself the trouble to ride over to Monkstone. Before setting out, he waited in the hall till he saw Kitty pass by, and then beckoned her into the drawing-room.

Miss Fillett, questioned as to the Squire's affections, answered ambiguously, and was glad when Bagot adverted to another topic, viz., his instructions as to what she was to say to Sloperton. In this matter, too, she faithfully promised her assistance, and declared nothing would be easier than to persuade the Captain that Lady Lee was violently in love with him ; "for," said Fillett, "he thinks all women is a-dying for him."

CHAPTER XXV.

THUS, in the interview with Mr Dubbley, to which Bagot now proceeded, he had, as we have seen, lost the power over him which he possessed in the former one. The Squire's manner in greeting the Colonel was marked by a nervous mixture of distrust, and a wish to appear as friendly as usual ; for his awe of Bagot, from habit and ancient association, was great, though the immediate cause for deference had vanished.

After the first greetings, Dubbley, having from old experience a secret misgiving that Bagot's manner indicated he had come a-borrowing, poured forth upon him a flood of questions and remarks more or less absurd and trivial, rather in the hope of delaying than of preventing the request he saw forthcoming. He expressed an astonishing and altogether inadequate interest in the state of Bagot's health—inquired after all the horses individually—

pressed him to take a variety of refreshments—and then fell back upon the weather.

But however conversationally a man may be minded, he can't very well sustain a dialogue by himself; and Bagot contributed so little towards keeping up the ball, that Mr Dubbley was constrained, after supernatural efforts, to let it drop, and sat nervously silent.

"In two words, Dubbley," said Bagot, "I'm come on a little business. I needn't tell you I'm tremendously hard up." (Mr Dubbley groaned, and perspired visibly.) "Now, you'll hardly believe it's all from looking after your interests in a certain quarter."

"'Pon my life—no really! Is it though? How's that?" inquired the Squire.

"How!" repeated Bagot. "Haven't you heard what a run there is in that direction just now? And I've stood up for you, Dubbley, like a Trojan."

"Monstrous kind, 'pon my life," said Mr Dubbley, without, however, much real appearance of gratitude.

"Yes," said the Colonel—"yes, I've stood by you like a trump, though, between you and me, I've had some deuced handsome offers to join the other interests."

"Have you, though?" said the Squire. "Take 'em, Colonel; take all you can get."

"What, and go against you!" cried Bagot.

"Never mind me," said the Squire, rubbing his head with both his hands. "Don't you think about me! Take all you can get. I've rather changed my mind about that business."

"Changed your mind, sir!" said Bagot, sternly. "Do I understand that you think yourself at liberty to meditate alliances with my family, or give up the idea, just as the whim suits you?"

"No, no," said the Squire; "quite a mistake, 'pon my life, quite. I was constant and true—constant and true; but she didn't fancy me, and there was an end of it."

"How do you know she doesn't fancy you?" asked Bagot, sharply.

Now Miss Fillett had carefully impressed upon the Squire the necessity of keeping her agency in the matter a secret; so the Squire had a little fib prepared for the occasion.

"Suppose she told me so herself," said the Squire; "suppose I had asked her (quietly, you know, without saying anything to anybody else), and she had said no—what would you say then?"

"I should say," growled Bagot, savagely, "that you deserved a refusal for your cursed folly and rashness. Why couldn't you be ruled by me, and wait till I told you 'twas time? Don't you know you're not fit to manage matters of this kind? and didn't I

always tell you you'd fail if you tried it? We shall have some trouble to set this right again."

"I don't want it set right," said the Squire, with a spasmodic effort; "I'd rather leave it just as it is. I give it up altogether. And, Colonel," added the Squire, gathering courage, after this piece of mutiny, to follow up the blow, "do you know, I was just wishing to see you about another little matter? You couldn't make it convenient to let me have some of the money I've advanced to you, could you? I've great occasion for it just now."

"Haven't I just told you I'm infernally hard up?" roared Bagot; "and yet you ask for repayment. No, it wouldn't be convenient—downright impossible at present—Now there!"

This kind of bearing would have been judicious, doubtless, if Bagot had retained his former hold upon the Squire. The colonel did not as yet quite appreciate the change in their positions.

The Squire was far from expecting repayment when he asked for it; but he had thus anticipated Bagot's fresh demand, and put it out of the question. Therefore, satisfied with the measure of success he had achieved, he resolved to put an end to an interview that was getting more embarrassing, and, opening the door, called out, "You may come in, Randy; we've finished our business"—for the

Squire had been closeted with that gentleman when Bagot was announced.

Mr Randy entered, greasy and majestic, and made a bow to Bagot, who scarcely deigned, in his ill-humour, to notice the salute. But Mr Randy, not to be repelled, drew out his snuff-box, and, having taken a pinch himself, made a conciliatory offer of the box to Bagot, who set it aside with so little courtesy that some of the contents were spilt on the proprietor's shoes. Then the Colonel, feeling himself baffled in his designs, departed sullenly, and in deep mortification; for the sting of defeat is felt most sharply when the victor is despised by the vanquished.

Mr Randy, holding in his hand the rejected snuff-box, glared after him in high indignation, breathing hard through his mouth, partly from wrath, partly because his nostrils were stopped with snuff, while his large red underlip advanced and receded loosely with his puffings.

"That per-r-son," said Mr Randy to the Squire, "appears to be ignorant of the usages of society. Had he not been standing on ma friend's har-r-th-stone, I should have taken the liberty to tell him a piece of my mind,"

"Never mind him," said the Squire; "I'm very glad he's gone." And Mr Dubbley, exulting in his own skill, did not fail to acquaint Mr Randy with

the circumstances under which it had been exercised; and by the advice and with the assistance of that gentleman (whose resentment caused him to enter warmly into the matter), sat down and composed a letter on the spot, praying Bagot for speedy repayment.

“Send it to him in a day or two,” said Mr Randy, “and if he takes no notice of it, I’ll write another more formal one; and, after that, if he doesn’t pay you, you can commence proceedings for the debt.” And, in matters relating to the law of debtor and creditor, Mr Randy, from habitually figuring in the former character, was excellently qualified to advise.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BAGOT, riding homewards in very ill humour, came into the grounds by the back entrance, and, having left his horse at the stables, was going towards the house through a bypath of the shrubbery, when he was waylaid by Kitty Fillett, who came simpering up to him to report progress with Sloperton. She had fulfilled Bagot's instructions very faithfully, having intercepted the Captain on the stairs ; and by a few mysterious hints and half-assertions, which she left it to his vanity to put in shape, had convinced him that Lady Lee's attachment to himself was evident to all the household ; and he had been so pleased that he had presented her with a sovereign on the spot.

"All very fine, you jade," returned the unsoftened Colonel. "You're deuced clever, I daresay ; but you've let that fool Dubbley slip through your fingers, for all that."

Miss Fillett feigned the greatest astonishment.

"Would you explain yourself, Colonel Lee?" asked Kitty, with an injured air.

Bagot briefly told her of Mr Dubbley's rebellion, adding, "This is exactly what you ought to have prevented."

"If he has spoke to my lady," said Kitty, with uplifted hands and eyes, "there's no truth in man. He took oaths, Colonel Lee, of that blasphemious kind, that it made my blood run cold to hear his offle words, that he wouldn't speak to my lady till I told him 'twas time. No," repeated Kitty; "after that, there's no truth in man."

Now Kitty had acquired, or thought she had acquired, a piece of intelligence likely to be interesting to Bagot. She had held some mental debates with herself as to whether she could turn her knowledge to best account by communicating or withholding it; and, thinking the latter course might serve to reassure the Colonel of her fidelity to his interests, she resolved to adopt it.

"What would you say, Colonel, if I was to tell you that my lady really had a preposition in favour of a certain gentleman?" said Kitty, mysteriously.

"Ha, yes," said Bagot. "What! that handsome puppy Sloperton, eh? She's kept it devilish close. It's him, is it?"

Miss Fillett, sucking her under lip into her mouth,

compressed it with her upper teeth, and stared intently at Bagot, shaking her head the while.

"Not him!" cried Bagot; "who then? Speak out, can't ye, baggage, without so much cursed mystery?"

But Kitty was rather fond of mystery, and it was not till Bagot's impatience broke out in a few imprecations that she consented to discover it.

"Well, don't swear, Colonel, and I'll tell you—for I can't bear profane language," said she. "You must know, sir, what between my own experiences and perusing of love-tales, which I've always been fond of, I can read the signs of parshality as well as another. Now, you know, Colonel, if there is a beloved one whose imidge occupies a shrine in our inmost 'art," ("Bother!" muttered Bagot,) "we can't listen to that imidge's name with the same indifference we feel towards other imidges. I've noticed lately that when"—(here Kitty approached within half a foot of Bagot, and lowered her voice to a proper pitch of mystery)—"I've noticed lately that when Captain Fane's name has come up—or when he's been present—or even when my lady's been looking on his visiting-card on the hall table—there's been a little tremulous sort of blushing appearance, as if she'd been caught telling a fib—not that she

could tell one for the world, I'm sure, but I merely use it as a simly. Well, this morning, when I was doing her hair, thinks I, 'I'll try how she'll look now when I talk of him.' So, says I, while I stood behind her, 'What a handsome gentleman that Captain is, my lady, who was here yesterday—I forget his name.' So I could see down over her shoulder that she caught her breath at this, and her neck got all scarlet, but she never spoke. So, says I, (just to try her, you see, Colonel,) 'I think they call him Sloper-ton,' when she got as cool as a cucumber directly, and says quite haughty, as usual, 'Never mind handsome gentlemen, Fillett, go on with my hair.' So, after a minute, I says—'No, Captain Sloperton's the dark one, but the fair man's more to my taste—they call him Fane, I think.' Well, sir, I saw her catch her breath again at this, but I couldn't see the colour of her face or neck, because her hair was all over it, and you know my lady's got hair enough to hide half-a-dozen faces—so I just parted it in front with the comb, and, looking into the glass, I saw she was as red as a rose. So I went on telling her how a sergeant in the regiment had told Noble the day of the review what a good gentleman he was, and how the men would all do anything for him—and she never interrupted me once, but listened as still as a mouse, though, if I'd been

talking of any one else, I should have been sent down stairs for my pains."

Bagot leaned for some moments with his back against the trunk of an acacia, frowning deeply, and protruding his lips in profound meditation. Then he stood up, and saying, "Kitty, you're a sharp girl, and no mistake, and if you go on helping me to play my cards it shall be all the better for you," he passed onwards to the house.

Bagot thus found himself the centre of a little knot of intrigue. Intrigue was not a thing he particularly delighted in; he would have disposed of the situation, with all its promise, to any enterprising person for a moderate sum of ready money down upon the nail. But as this was not practicable, he resolved to do the best he could for himself.

While still cogitating, he saw Fane, who had been to the Heronry on a visit, crossing in front of the house, leading his horse by the bridle on his way homeward. The sight of him put the finishing stroke to Bagot's meditations. His trains of thought had all pointed towards the expediency of laying Fane under contribution. Here was the man, and he had only to decide upon the mode.

What with Seager's hints, his own private ideas on the subject, and his first success with Mr Dubbley, Bagot had gradually begun to look on Lady Lee

as Mr Barnum looked on Tom Thumb—as an opera-manager looks on a musical star from the Continent—as a Manchester orator looks on his principles—viz., as a promising speculation. Accordingly, Fane appeared merely in the shape of another chance of turning her ladyship to account.

Bagot had scarcely ever spoken to Fane, beyond the commonest salutations. They had held aloof from each other for opposite reasons—Bagot, because he didn't understand Fane—Fane, because he did understand Bagot. The latter, therefore, was not quite sure of his best mode of coming to an understanding with him on the subject of his thoughts. One thing was quite clear, that this was not a case for Seager's management. When a man had to be browbeat or inveigled, Seager was a capital agent; but Bagot had an intuitive perception that neither process would answer with Fane. He resolved, therefore, to manage the matter for himself, the points to be kept in view being, 1st, to make his meaning plain; 2d, to leave a loophole to creep out of, in case his meaning should prove distasteful to his auditor.

Indecision or slowness in action were not among the Colonel's deficiencies. In fact, I take it to be one of the great advantages of a sporting, betting life, like Bagot's, that it develops a talent for

prompt decision on chances, and quick action thereupon.

While Bagot, as I have said, was totally unable to appreciate Fane, Fane was quite capable of seeing through and through Bagot. Had he chosen, he might have been the leader of a whole army of Bagots. As it was, he rather despised him and the like, and was not, perhaps, duly careful in concealing his contempt; for contempt, however just, is more powerful when latent than when manifest. However, Fane seeing in Bagot a somewhat dissipated and not particularly respectable elderly gentleman, and not perceiving any points they were likely to occupy in common either of sympathy or repulsion, had hitherto taken very little notice of him. He was, therefore, not altogether prepared for the sudden appearance of friendship with which the Colonel now joined him, and took his arm.

"Fane, my boy," said Bagot, with a charming paternal frankness, "lead your horse down as far the lodge. I haven't met with anybody worth speaking to this whole day before, and I shall be glad of a few minutes of respectable society."

This opening Bagot intended to be flattering and propitiating. Fane responded with his usual civil indifference.

"I never see much of you," Bagot went on.

"You're always otherwise engaged. I suspect you find other society more attractive, eh!" and Bagot administered a facetious poke in the chest.

"I do, certainly," answered Fane, simply.

"Why, there, now!" said Bagot, "I was just the same when I was a young man. Damme, sir, show me a petticoat, and the best fellows in England might go to Jericho for me. Ah, ha!—gad, sir, we're all alike, and I don't blame you for it."

"That's a most cheering assurance," returned Fane. "But might I ask what your delicate inuendoes point at, Colonel?"

"Inuendoes!" quoth the Colonel. "Not a bit of it. I'm all plain and above-board. I was only thinking of what I was myself when I was a young man. And now I've just time, between this and the lodge, to tell you something that happened to a friend of mine, who was a young man, fond of ladies' society, just as you might be. Well, sir, he fell rather in love with a widow lady—young, rich, handsome—devilish rich and handsome, sir—and she seemed to like him. Well, sir, it so happened that the widow had a relation, a deuced good sort of fellow, who had some control over her second marriage, if she should think of such a thing. Now, though he was, as I say, a deuced good sort of fellow, yet you know good fellows may be unfortunate in their circum-

stances as well as bad ones, and the said relation was particularly hard up. So, seeing, as I say, my friend's partiality for the widow, and seeing that it was returned, he, like a frank, honest fellow, as he was, went straight to my friend, and said plainly, 'I like you—I'm fond of my niece, or sister-in-law, or whatever she might be—and you like each other. If I could afford it, I'd say at once, Take her, and all happiness to you—but my circumstances won't allow me to do what my feelings dictate. But if you, knowing my circumstances, enable me to do what I would wish by coming to a friendly arrangement, then, sir, you have my consent.' ”

The beginning of this speech was scarcely attended to by Fane; for he preferred his own thoughts, the subject of which was, naturally enough, the visit he had just paid to Lady Lee, and which he had found especially charming. But something in the Colonel's ingenious parable attracted his attention, though, being quite ignorant of the real circumstances which that gentleman was thus shadowing forth, he never suspected his own personal interest in the subject. Bagot, however, fancied he had put the case in a manner at once delicate and transparent.

So he repeated, “‘If,’ he said to my friend, ‘if you, knowing my circumstances, enable me to do what I would wish, then, sir, you have my consent.’”

"He meant, I suppose, in plain words," said Fane, "that he had some power or influence in the matter, and was ready to sell it."

"Exactly so," said Bagot—"exactly so. Now, my friend being a sensible man, and a man of the world, what do you think was his reply?"

"That," said Fane, "I should think, depended entirely on your friend's temper. If he was a choleric man, he probably kicked the scoundrel."

"What, sir!" thundered Bagot. "Do you mean to —. Excuse my warmth; I forgot that you didn't know the persons I speak of: the fact is, both were friends of mine, and I naturally dislike to hear anything to the disadvantage of either. But you look at the thing in a wrong light. The lady's relation was an honourable man, and a gentleman, yet, as I say, under the circumstances he did not hesitate to make the proposal."

"I'm really sorry to have been obliged to express such a strong opinion of any friend of yours," returned Fane, quite coolly; "but allow me to suggest that in future you might select some more favourable trait in his character to enlarge upon, if you don't wish to hear him abused."

"I see we differ on the point," quoth Bagot. "But, whatever opinion of the proposal my friend may have entertained, he was sharp enough to see

that he couldn't carry his point with the lady without the other's consent, and, therefore, was glad to agree. If he hadn't agreed," said Bagot, significantly—"if he hadn't agreed, he might have said good-by to her at once."

"Really," said Fane, "if one might judge of the lady by her connections, the sooner he took leave of her the better."

"Ah, well! every man to his taste," said Bagot, in a calm tone, but with a somewhat diabolical expression of face. "Some are nicer than others; however, we won't pursue the subject, as we're not likely to agree. Here we are at the lodge, and I think I'll turn back. Good morning; good morning!"

"Eccentric old gentleman that," thought Fane, as he mounted and rode away. "He must have got drunk rather earlier than usual to-day."

"Curse the fellow!" thought Bagot, indignantly. "What a fool I was to give him an opportunity of insulting me, when I couldn't resent it. Damn him! I'll be revenged on him yet."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BAGOT having thus failed on two points, his sole resource was Mr Seager. He had great confidence in that gentleman's diplomatic talents, and was not disappointed.

"All right, old boy," said Seager; "I've managed it. Sloperton perceived the sense of the matter directly, and came to terms at once."

"No!" exclaimed Bagot; "did he, by Jove! Well, how much did he offer, eh?"

"Why, I manœuvred for a long time," said Seager, "in hopes of getting more, but at last I fixed him for a thousand. When he gets the consent written and signed, he'll give you a check for the money."

"Not bad," said Bagot; "not bad! I wish I had been as successful. What d'ye think that fellow Dubbley said?" And here Bagot recounted his interview with the Squire, but concealed his attempt upon Fane and its result. Mr Seager listened to the

details of the former failure with a look of grim satisfaction, thinking, probably, how much better he would have managed the matter.

Afterwards Bagot listened to the account of Mr Seager's interview with Sloperton, and entirely approved of his friend's proceedings. Then Seager, feeling sleepy in consequence of being up late for two or three preceding nights, and not finding Bagot disposed for *ecarté*, retired early to bed, and Bagot remained drinking his brandy-and-water by himself.

With each successive glass, Bagot's sense of injury from Fane and desire of revenge increased. To have been insulted to his face—securely insulted—told he was a scoundrel who deserved to be kicked—(for Bagot never doubted that Fane perfectly understood his meaning, and availed himself of the form under which it was conveyed to be severe upon him)—this went revolving round and round perpetually in Bagot's mind like a toothed wheel, each point lacerating him as it came uppermost. It appeared to him, too, that Fane was braving him—daring him to do his worst. Perhaps he and Lady Lee had come to a private understanding, and were ready to defy him. In that case, he would make them change their note.

Presently it began to dawn on Bagot's mind, rendered luminous by brandy-and-water, that he had

now an opportunity of at once revenging himself on Fane, and repaying her scorn to Lady Lee. He would tell her, at the first opportunity, that he knew her feelings for Fane, and he would dare her to indulge them. Opportunity ! Why wait for it ?—why shouldn't he make it ?—why shouldn't he execute the idea at once ? At any rate, he would find out whether she had retired for the night. So he rang the bell, and desired his servant to inquire from Lady Lee's maid if her ladyship was still in the drawing-room. The answer was, that she was there alone, the two young ladies having gone to their chamber. Now, then, was the time—he felt quite up to the mark, and he was not sure of finding himself so in the morning, for, somehow, he felt always cowed and nerveless in her presence early in the day. But now, he was firm, resolved, and didn't care a straw for the airs, or the sarcasms, or the contempt of the grandest woman in England. Afraid ! no, by Jove, he'd tell her a piece of his mind.

In this happy frame of temper Bagot finished his glass ; and, without other external signs of his potations than a hardness of breathing, an additional flush of face, and a certain fixedness of eye, repaired to the drawing-room.

Lady Lee, sitting reading alone there, was somewhat surprised at the Colonel's entrance. She very

rarely beheld him after dinner ; and he had never before, after dining in his own apartment, made his appearance in the drawing-room at this hour. So, laying down her book with some little impatience at the unseasonable interruption, of which she could not divine the cause, she waited to be told the reason of the visit.

Bagot did not find it so easy to begin as he had anticipated. Sitting alone sipping his grog, and carrying everything, in imagination, his own way, nothing could be simpler ;—arrived in the presence of her calm ladyship, it appeared quite another thing. After saying good evening, he seated himself on the other side of the table, and looked fiercely into the fire.

“ I daresay you didn’t expect to see me to-night,” said he, at length.

Lady Lee said she certainly had not anticipated the pleasure of a visit from him ; and asked to what cause she was indebted for it ?

“ Not for any pleasure to myself or you,” answered Bagot, who wished to work himself up to a proper pitch of sternness by a recapitulation of his injuries—lashing himself with his tail, as it were. “ No, ma’am, I’m too well aware of your dislike to me—which you seem to take a pride in showing—to expect any pleasure from an interview between us.”

"I protest, Colonel," said Lady Lee, laying her book on the table, and looking at him with surprise—"I protest, Colonel, I don't know how I've offended you. If you will point out the imaginary cause of offence, I will do all in my power to remove it."

"Too late, ma'am—too late," returned Bagot, waving his hand majestically. "A little timely consideration of my feelings, and of your own interests, might have made me a friend;—you have thought proper to make me a foe, and must take the consequences."

"I shall regret very much any difference between us," said Lady Lee; "and none the less for its being apparently causeless; but as to any further consequences than this regret, which one naturally feels at disagreeing with family connections, I confess I do not foresee them."

"Perhaps I may open your eyes, then," said Bagot. "You and I know very well that, so long as you live here as you have hitherto done, I have no hold upon you, and you can continue to enjoy all the pleasant things which the foolish fondness of my poor nephew Joe lavished upon you, unmolested. But there was a little clause in his will, my lady—a little clause about a second marriage—wherein I become a rather more important person."

Bagot uttered all this in a hard unmodulated tone,

like one repeating a task ; and, having got thus far, wiped his forehead and went on, still without looking at her ladyship.

"Therefore, as I say, so long as you continue to amuse yourself with your poems, and your science, and your music, and any other harmless silliness that might please you, you were quite right to treat me according to your will and pleasure ; but, when you began to think of more serious pastime, prudence might have dictated a little civility. I'm aware who the person is that you've honoured by your partiality, and I tell you now, that you shall never come together with my consent. Damme, ma'am, he's a man I hate !" cried Bagot, turning furiously upon her ladyship, who sat gazing at him with wide eyes. "He has insulted me, and I shall have double pleasure in stopping the business."

"Colonel ! how *dare* you talk to me in this way !" said her ladyship, with forced calmness. "Will you leave the room of your own accord, or shall I call in the protection of the servants ?"

"Never mind the servants," said Bagot, flourishing the pocket-handkerchief he had been wiping his forehead with—"you won't need their protection. I'm talking of a matter I've a legal right to talk of, and you had best not interrupt me."

"Has any one dared to say there has been word

or thought of such an event as my marrying?" said Lady Lee.

"I don't know about thoughts," said Bagot, "nor whether any words of your intentions have passed as yet; but, I ask you, whether you do or do not feel a fondness for that fellow Fane? And he!—what does he come here for so often, d'ye think? curse him. D'ye suppose all the world's blind?"

Lady Lee had turned very pale, and sunk back in her chair. But, recovering herself, she said—"Colonel, the state I perceive you to be in will, perhaps, to-morrow, be some excuse for these insults—but don't repeat them; and, to prevent that, either you must now leave the room, or I will."

"Not till I've told you the consequences," said Bagot, "and I'll do that in two words. If you marry him without my consent—and, by the Lord, you shall never have it—I'll use all the power the will gives me against you. You shall moult all these fine feathers very quickly, my lady. And, not only that, but the boy, too—I shall take my right as guardian, and bring him up myself. He shan't be a milk-sop then; no, I'll squeeze the milk clean out of him, and make a man of him—though, perhaps, his education won't be conducted after a manner that's quite agreeable to your ideas. Now, you know what you've got to expect."

Here Bagot rose, and glancing for a moment at Lady Lee's frightened look, and marking the shudder that stole over her at the mention of his intention to train Julius up, and "make a man of him," he walked away to the door, muttering, as he opened it—"Checkmated, by G—d."

And as he went stumbling along the passages towards his own room, he kept muttering—"Not mated—no, damme, not mated, but checkmated—ha, ha!" chuckling immensely over the exquisite humour of this conceit, and repeating—"Not mated; no, damme, checkmated," till the door of his room closed upon him.

With a pale face and heaving breast Lady Lee sat looking at the door through which he had made his exit. His unexpected coming—the lateness and loneliness of the hour—the succession of new and unpleasant sensations which his words and demeanour excited—and his sudden departure, leaving her once more to her solitude,—all, when looked back upon, wore the aspect of an ugly dream. Indignation was at first the predominant feeling; but she was conscious, too, of an under-current of conviction that his drunken spite had not vented itself in groundless assertions.

She tried to recall the terms of the will. Her affliction for Sir Joseph's death had, at the time, caused

the clause in question to pass almost unnoticed. Yet now she remembered the purport of the words to be nearly what Bagot had stated. She had thought them mere words of form ; the idea of the possibility of her being in any way affected by them had never crossed her mind ; and if it had, she would never have suspected that Bagot would really attempt to use a power thus given him. But now his unexpected behaviour showed that he had long been a secret enemy, only waiting an opportunity to wound her. Had he indeed obtained this opportunity ? Was it possible that this man, for whom she had hitherto felt nothing more than careless scorn, had indeed, or could ever have, any power over her, Hester Lee ?

At the mention of Fane's name she had lost all power of reply, and had let the Colonel go away under an impression that the allusion was correct. She wished she had detained him for a moment while she contradicted this. But, then, *could* she contradict him truly ? This set her thinking on a point she had never before closely considered. She felt that to lose Fane's society would not be like losing the society of anybody else ; that she had begun to watch for his visits, and could now scarcely face the idea of relinquishing them. Yet they must now end ; for, if the half-formed idea that had sometimes pre-

sented itself was true—viz., that Fane felt as much pleasure in her society as she in his—the only honest course left for her was, to put an end at once to expectations that could never have a result.

Anger, regret, injured delicacy, and a host of complex feelings—some of them merely combinations of these—followed Lady Lee to her pillow, and when at last she slept, arranged the phantasmagoria of her dreams. In these last Bagot figured in a variety of agreeable characters—from a simple nightmare occupied in strangling her, to no less a personage than his infernal majesty himself—a look of baleful and fiendish joy giving terror and dignity to the scorbutic countenance of the Colonel, and lending awe and mockery to the tones of his voice. And the intervals of wakefulness in the watches of the night were scarcely less dreary. No comfort appeared—not even the comfort of confiding her griefs to a friend—for the subject was such as could not be mentioned to any one.

Fane, then, coming next day (for his visits were now daily), only noticed at first an unusual paleness of complexion, and seriousness of aspect—traces, perhaps (he thought), of some slight indisposition, mental or bodily, which would be quite sufficient to account for the coolness of his reception. But when, instead of the look of interest, the animated reply,

the frequent appeal on matters of taste and opinion, to which he had of late been accustomed, he found only averted looks and cold answers, he became at first sorely puzzled, then silent; and at last, with his pride roused into something like resentment, he rose to take leave.

Lady Lee had reddened beneath the inquiring glances he had cast at her, and traced afterwards, with deep pain, the feelings which her constrained behaviour was exciting in him. But now, as he was about to depart, she could scarcely restrain her tears, though luckily she did restrain them. But she could not restrain a warm pressure of the hand he doubtfully extended to her at parting, and an appealing look cut suddenly short as she turned away to the window.

Had Lady Lee possessed a character the most foreign imaginable to her own—that of a finished coquette—she could not, by her wiles, have produced half so decisive an effect on Fane as by this conduct, the natural effect of the struggle of feelings with new and hard resolutions. It set him thinking about himself and Lady Lee as effectually as Bagot's behaviour had turned Lady Lee's thoughts in the same direction. He, too, began to question himself as to the degree of esteem in which he held her, and as to his capability of readily relinquishing her society.

The result of his cogitations on this head will come to light in due time. At present, he resolved to be not rash in his resentment at her coolness, but to wait till her ladyship was in a better humour before questioning her as to what had put her in a bad one.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BAGOT'S drunken exultation at night was exchanged next morning for a feeling of shame and contrition. So far as he could derive satisfaction from annoying Lady Lee, he had been successful enough, but he was not quite certain that this declaration of his was likely to advance his interests in other respects. He had made his position at the Heronry an awkward one, and he had placed Hester on her guard against him ; and he had gained nothing but a feeling of gratified revenge, which he did not find half so satisfactory as he had expected.

Thinking two heads would be better than one in retrieving this false step, he communicated his plans to Mr Seager at breakfast. That gentleman's opinion did not disappoint the Colonel.

"You know, Lee, it was a deuced silly thing of you, and no mistake," said his adviser. "Why, you wrung the neck of your decoy-duck ; but, now it's

done, you must make the best of it. If properly represented to Sloperton, it might be made to look like extreme zeal for his interests that induced you to dish his rival. We needn't tell him that you suspected Lady Lee of liking Fane, but only that Fane liked her; and if cleverly put, it ought to screw another five hundred out of him."

This appeared to Bagot not at all a bad idea. Decidedly Seager was a sharp fellow.

"As I have managed all the preliminaries," Seager went on, "and Sloperton understands the business perfectly, you can mention this to him yourself. And, while you are speaking with him on this subject, I want you to manage a little matter for me at the same time. I told you I wasn't helping you for nothing," added Seager, with an amiable grin.

"Well, old fellow, what is it I can do for you?" inquired Bagot.

Mr Seager, who had finished his breakfast, lit his cigar before replying. "I got a letter from the vet this morning," said he, after a puff or two, "about the mare."

"Yes," said Bagot, "yes. Well, what does he think of her?"

"Just what I always said and thought," replied Seager. "Navicular, and no mistake."

"You don't mean that?" cried Bagot, drawing a long breath. "By Jove—then it's all up with her."

"All up with her," echoed Seager, quite calmly.

"And you—why, God bless me, you're in for £1500—gone without a chance!"

(I should explain, for the benefit of lady readers, that the "navicular" disease is a disease of the bones of a horse's foot, producing lameness, always tedious, and mostly incurable.)

"'Tis a sort of thing, too, that you'll be obliged to pay up at once," Bagot went on. "Why, sir, it's ruinous. I can't see any way out of it."

Mr Seager still smoked away, apparently as much at his ease as if he had won, instead of being on the point of losing, the money.

"How do you propose to manage about it?" asked Bagot.

"That's exactly the point I've just said I wanted your assistance about," returned Seager, re-twisting a tobacco leaf that had got loose round the wet end of his cigar. "What was it you saw the mare do when you timed her?"

"Four miles in twelve minutes and fifty-eight seconds," said Bagot, promptly. He had a capital memory for such things; most people have for what interests them; and when persons complain of hav-

ing weak memories, we may generally conclude they don't take much interest in anything.

"Exactly," said Seager. "Now, suppose you were to mention that to Sloperton."

"What good would that do?" asked Bagot. "You know she couldn't do it again."

"But you needn't mention *that*," said Seager. "You needn't tell anything more than you actually saw."

"Well," said Bagot, wiping his forehead—for he actually perspired as he caught a glimpse of Mr Seager's meaning. "Well, what then?"

"Then you might, in a confidential way, hint that, considering what you saw the mare do, the event seemed to you a certainty; and, in the form of a bit of friendly advice, you could mention, that you thought Seager himself (a deuced fair, liberal kind of fellow, your friend Seager, you know, about such things) was rather ashamed of such a hollow thing, such a regular certainty, and would, perhaps, let him off for two-thirds of the bet. Our friend Sloperton would be glad to do that, if he thought himself certain otherwise to loose the whole."

"But, sir, this would be swindling!" cried Bagot.

"Not doing it will be ruin," quoth Seager, puffing away at his cigar.

"No, by Jove, no!" said old Bagot, his lips trem-

bling with agitation. "In all my transactions, sir, I've preserved my character as a man of honour ; I could not consent to forfeit it by making a false statement."

"Who the devil wants you to?" asked Seager, in the same quiet tone as before. "Don't jump before you come to the fence, old boy. All the statement I want you to make is a statement of what you actually saw—you can't object to that ; and if you choose to add a hint of the sort I mentioned, why, in my opinion it will do the business."

"And suppose he finds out that the mare's dead lame all the time, what'll he think of me then?"

"I'll take care he shan't—but, if he should, who can blame you?" retorted Seager. "You were only giving him a piece of friendly advice, founded on your own knowledge of the circumstances. You were not to know the mare was lame. Why, sir, so far from blaming you, I say he'll be grateful to you."

Bagot got off his chair, and walked nervously up and down the room, his hands and lips trembling.

"No, no Seager ; this mustn't be. In anything honourable I'd help you, with all my heart and soul ; but this is too dirty."

"Nobody, now, would suppose I'd just been doing dirty work for *him*," said Seager, addressing an

imaginary personage, and motioning with his head towards Bagot. "Very well; please yourself, old gentleman. I'm afraid, then, I shall have to come down on you for that little debt, to help me to pay up."

Bagot winced at this. "Well," said Bagot, "I can't help it. I hope I shall be able to give you the money whenever you demand it."

"Ah, you're cursed independent now," said Mr Seager, wagging his head. "But you forget who made you so. You'd never have managed that business, of the consent with Sloperton, by yourself."

Just then Bagot's servant entered with a note for his master. Bagot took it, and, after reading it, cast it down on the table, swearing he was the most unlucky poor devil in existence.

"What's the matter now?" said Seager.

"Read that," said Bagot, pushing the note towards him. It was from Mr Dubbley, and ran as follows:—

"DEAR COLONEL,—I have let my affairs get into such confusion lately, from want of care," ("lying, stingy rascal," muttered Bagot; "*he* careless indeed!") "that I've been obliged to put them into my lawyer's hands for arrangement. On seeing your promissory notes (amounting to £770, 10s.) he wanted

to commence proceedings at once for the sum,—but as we've always been great friends, Colonel, I wouldn't hear of such a thing till I had made application to you for payment in a less disagreeable way. Hoping sincerely there may be no occasion for such harsh proceedings, which would cause me deep regret, I am, dear Colonel, yours faithfully,

J. DUBBLEY."

"I should like to know who wrote that note for him," said Bagot. "His lawyer, most likely, and that shows he's in earnest. 'Pon my life, if I can't bully the fellow out of this intention, the business will be serious."

"Seven hundred and seventy, and that little debt of mine, will pretty well swallow up Sloper-ton's thousand pounds, when you get it, without reckoning tradesmen's bills," remarked Seager, quietly.

"It won't leave me a penny," said the Colonel. Mr Seager walked away whistling to the window.

"Talk of the devil, you know," said he. "Here comes Sloperton." Bagot followed him to the window, and beheld the Captain riding towards the house.

"I'll tell you what, old fellow," said Seager, "'tis no use your attempting to kick. You must

just put the matter to Sloperton, as I said. There's no other way out of the mess for you. You can manage it perfectly well, without compromising yourself in the least; and if you do manage it for me, why, instead of dunning you, I'll lend you another hundred or two. Send for Sloperton up here; first tell him how you have put Fane's pipe out, and when that has put him in a good humour, and made him think you're as good as a father to him, put in a word for me in the other business."

"But, gad, sir, he'll believe everything I say, like gospel," said Bagot. "He knows my character as a man of honour."

"Then, for once, your character will be of some service to you," returned Seager, grinning. "What's the good of it, if you can't turn it to account? I'll leave you now to talk to him alone."

"He'll do it," muttered Seager, with a chuckle, as he walked along the passage. "Here, Wilson" (calling to Bagot's servant), "run down and tell Captain Sloperton the Colonel will be glad to see him in his own room."

The task that Seager had imposed on his unwilling associate was very much simplified in the interview that followed, owing to the circumstance that Sloperton had for some time suspected himself of having made a rash bet. Two or three

trial gallops had not confirmed his confidence in Bouquet, who was not a fast horse, and who, though he improved greatly in condition by training, was of so uncertain a temper that he could not be depended on to do his best. Besides, Mr Oates, whose connections with the sporting world were very numerous, had privately set some of his friends to find out what they could about Seager's mare, and the result of their inquiries rather heightened than diminished the reputation Seager had given her ; so that Bagot's monitory hints, far from being received with suspicion, only chimed in with Sloperton's own misgivings, and caused him to think that the Colonel's good offices should be by all means accepted to get him out of the scrape.

The worthy associates did not meet again till dinner-time. Seager did not say anything, but cast an inquiring glance at Bagot, which the latter answered by throwing a note on the table, saying, "There—you'll see by that what I've done for you. By heaven, sir, I wouldn't have done it for myself, nor for any other man living ; but you had me at an advantage."

The note was from Sloperton :—

"DEAR SEAGER" (it said), "Lee and I have been talking over that bet I have with you, and he

seems to think you wouldn't mind compromising it for two-thirds of the stakes, but that's too much. My horse Bouquet is in capital condition—never better—but, at the same time, I don't want to run my head against a post. Therefore, if you like to take the enclosed check for £750, and let the bet be off, well and good—if not, you can return the check, and I'll trust my luck to win yet.

“P.S.—Bouquet is as hard as a nail, and gallops better than ever I saw him.”

Mr Seager chuckled over this note like a magpie over a stolen jewel.

“Of course, he engaged your good offices, Lee, to palaver me into the bargain,” said Mr Seager, as Bagot ladled out the soup. “Why don't you use your eloquence to persuade me? I don't think I shall take his check,—oh, no,—nothing on earth would persuade me, Colonel, certainly not!—throwing away such a capital chance, you know, with the mare in such splendid condition for her match,”—and Mr Seager, laying down his spoon, leaned back in his chair and laughed uproariously.

“I tell you what it is,” said Bagot, looking fiercely at him over the soup tureen. “This is no joking matter, and we'll change the subject, if you please. I feel, sir—by heaven, sir, I feel like a scoundrel!”

"That's wrong, Lee ; quite wrong," said Mr Seager. "If that feeling came first, and prevented you from doing a thing, 'twould be all very well, but, coming afterwards, it can only make one uneasy. We'll drown it, old boy, without delay, for the sight of that careworn visage of yours takes away my appetite. What do you say to a glass of champagne instead of sherry? Here, Wilson, bring champagne !"

The champagne had the effect which Seager anticipated, of blunting for the time the prickings of Bagot's conscience (what was left of it), and rendering him a more cheerful companion. But the next morning, when the enlivening effects had evaporated, the Colonel was lower in spirits than ever, and so savage, at times, that Seager began to think it high time to quit his society for a while. Accordingly, packing his portmanteau, he went off, having first written a note to Sloperton making a great favour of accepting his check.

After this, take the next chapter, good reader, as an ounce of civet to sweeten your imagination.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I'LL tell you what, Reley," said Rosa ; "but 'tis a great secret, and, besides, I may be wrong, you know ; but I don't think I am."

"What is it, you little plague?" asked Orelia.

(They were walking to Josiah's parsonage, a day or two after the incidents just narrated, and were now near the lodge-gate on their way thither.)

"Why, you see, Reley, you are so occupied with your own—a—tender passion," said Rosa, glancing cunningly up at Orelia's face, and then shrieking aloud, for Orelia pinched her arm in return for her impertinence. "I declare, Reley, if I were a man, I'd as soon make love to a she-panther as to you," said Rosa, getting away to the farther side of the path, and rubbing the injured arm with her other hand. "You will certainly scratch your lover's eyes out in some of your fits of affection."

"Come here, you plaguy little creature," quoth Orelia, "and go on with what you were going to tell me."

"But if you pinch me again I'll not tell you," retorted Rosa. "What I was going to say is, that you are so occupied with your own—affairs, only affairs," cried Rosa, darting out of reach, "that you can't see anything else going on under your very eyes."

"Why can't you speak out without all this mystery? If there's a thing in the world I detest, 'tis mystery," said Orelia, masking her curiosity under this rebuke.

"Haven't you noticed," said Rosa, confidentially, "that Hester seems to think a great deal of a certain person! I have."

"A certain person! what person?" inquired Orelia. "You know I never could guess a riddle in my life. But your delight is to tease one."

"To be sure, I didn't suppose she'd ever allow herself to be fond of anybody," continued Rosa. "But she is—oh, certainly, she is—and, do you know, I'm rather glad of it. Yes, I give the matter my entire approbation."

"I solemnly vow," said Orelia, stopping short, and bringing her parasol with such violence against the path, that it penetrated an inch and more into the

gravel—"I solemnly vow, that, if you don't say what you have to say at once, without any more nonsense, I won't walk another step with you; I'll go straight back to the house."

"No, you won't, though—no, you won't," said Rosa, silyly. "You won't go back to the house just yet, I'm sure," and she pointed down the road.

Just emerged from the lodge, and coming towards them, was a figure, the appearance of which made Orelia start as her eyes followed the direction of Rosa's finger. The dragoon Onslow, in plain clothes, his face thin from recent illness, but with a deep flush on his cheeks, was rapidly approaching. Orelia gave a little start, and then, half involuntarily, drew aside from the path a step or two to where a huge beech trunk interrupted the view from the lodge. As he came close, he took off his hat and bowed without speaking.

Orelia, stilling by an effort the momentary agitation that had fluttered her plumes, "hoped he had quite recovered from his sad accident;" while Rosa, fancying, perhaps, that her own part in the interview might not be either interesting or important, went onward to the parsonage.

"I had intended to depart without again venturing into your presence," said Onslow. "Had I still worn a military dress, I should, at all events, have

stolen quietly away. But seeing you so near, I could not forbear making a last appearance in my own character."

Orelia glanced at his dress, which was plain, but in excellent taste. She had thought him handsome in uniform, but his present costume was a better test of his pretensions to breeding; and she inwardly decided that his air would fully have maintained them had he been a Chesterfield (I mean of the last, not of the present century).

"And why do you not still wear a military dress, Mr Onslow?"

"Because," said Onslow, "I am no longer a soldier. Lately—only very lately—the sense of degradation attached to my position became greater than I could bear, and, rather than prolong it, I have preferred to cast myself on the world again."

"And—and—are you going to quit this neighbourhood, Mr Onslow?"

"I am now quitting it, probably for ever. In doing so, I have but one regret; and I take with me but one cheering thought and pleasant remembrance."

If Orelia had, as is the duty of young ladies in like cases, affected ignorance of his meaning, she might have asked him, in an innocent inquiring way, what this regret and this remembrance might be. She might have suggested various causes of sorrow—such

as quitting an agreeable neighbourhood—fine scenery—losing, perhaps, pleasant acquaintances in the town—all with an indifferent lightsome air, like that with which many an object of adoration loves to survey her parting worshipper as he wallows in the mud of his own embarrassment; rather poking him deeper in, than stretching a helping hand, while all the time she is, perhaps, longing to see the struggling mortal extricate himself and come floundering to her feet. But Orelia's nature being too ingenuous for that sort of dissembling, she made no inquiry on the subject, but merely hoped, in a low voice, "that his regret was not caused by his future appearing less hopeful than his past had been:" and, considering her somewhat fluttered state at the time, the question was cleverly enough put, for it gave him a good opening to talk about himself, if he were so disposed.

He paused, as if considering whether he should his tale unfold; but, looking up, said—"For my future, I must trust only to Fortune and myself, for I have no better securities. But I am most unwilling to leave you with the idea that one whom you honoured with more notice and kindness than he deserved, was beneath it; and will therefore confide as much to you as Cesario did to the Countess Olivia, saying, that 'my parentage is above my fortunes—I am a gentleman.'"

Orelia, if she had followed her impulse, might have answered in the words of the Countess—"Fear not, Cesario, take thy fortunes up;" but pride would not let her give so much encouragement to one who had been so little explicit. She only murmured (unconsciously sketching the while a gigantic classical profile in the gravel with the point of her parasol) that "she wished she had the pleasure of knowing she could be of any possible service to him in his future career."

"She might—indeed she might!" Onslow warmly assured her.

Finishing the profile, and putting an elaborate beard to it, she asked him, "would he show her how?"

"By saying," he replied, "that, in any struggles—any misfortunes—or any gleam of success that may fall to my lot, I may be assured of your sympathy."

"Yes," she said, "yes—of her warmest sympathy; but," she added, "the aid she alluded to was of a more real and practical kind."

The ex-dragoon smiled. "When I rode that race," he said, "the prize that allured me, and which I should have valued more than ever Olympic victor esteemed his crown, was your glove. I lost the prize then—may I now carry it with me as a solace?"

During this speech Orelia had made as many pro-

files as the space of ground at her feet admitted of—finishing off by the great straggling initials “O. P.,” with a flourish beneath them, as was her custom in making her autograph. Then she drew off her glove, and, the act being quite in character with her usual queenly demeanour, she presented it to him, with the native loftiness of her air quite restored to her.

He took it—and, with it, he clasped the ends of the fingers that gave it. Lifting them to his lips, he kissed her hand—once—twice—thrice; and, before she had quite made up her mind to snatch it away, he was half-way down the road. Then, with a flushed cheek, she turned away from the shade of the beech beneath which they had been standing, and, forgetting Rosa, parsonage, and all, in the more interesting thoughts that had intervened, went slowly back to the Heronry.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE coming of Lady Lee to Lanscote parsonage always shone on the dreamy impressionable mind of its occupant, Josiah, like the rising of the full moon. Stately clouds attended her pure effulgence; deep shadows seemed to lie on objects not directly smitten by her radiance; and, though not averse to cheerfulness, she could command thoughts solemn and still. In her presence familiar objects grew unfamiliar, and the Curate's world was idealised.

Rosa, on the other hand, came dancing into the household like a summer morning. Shadows fled away till everything was seen only in outline and colour, whatever it had of brightness starting into view. Her very tears, when they chanced to fall, were merely refreshing, not chilling, nor melancholy; and the little thing would shine out again from behind a passing cloud like the very personification of early June.

Josiah's soul, not naturally by any means cloudy, caught, therefore, an additional beam of cheerfulness, as, looking up from his flower-bed, he beheld his rosy sister coming down the lane, her bonnet hanging by its strings on her arm on account of the heat; her hair, as usual, somewhat dishevelled, as if the zephyrs took an impudent delight in sporting there more than elsewhere; and her lips parted as her breath came through, quickened by the exercise of walking, diversified by desultory runs and rushes.

As Rosa bent over her brother's stooping form, an additional freshness and perfume seemed to him to be exhaled from the flower-bed. Her reason for so stooping was to give him a sisterly kiss. But the kisses of sisters, though capable of driving adolescent bystanders to frenzy, are among the class of sweets that waste themselves on the desert air. The prospect of kissing Rosa would have made the very owl that dwelt in the belfry of Lanscote church fly hither, and hop winking in her walk in broadest sunshine; but Josiah (in this instance much the greater owl of the two) scarce turned his cheek to her salute. Having, therefore, touched with her lips the edge of his shirt collar (for only her nose reached his cheek), she remained looking down over his shoulder, on which her hand rested, at the flower that occupied his attention.

“What is it, Josiah?”

"Observe, my child," said the Curate, who was very patriarchal to Rosa—"observe that this flower, a native of the antipodes, which you now see unfolding itself, is perhaps the first of its race that ever saw the light of an English sun. I got the seed from the Heronry, where there are other plants of the kind, but mine has been the first to flower."

"Dear me," said Rosa, "how curious! But it's not very pretty, is it?—not half so pretty as this moss-rose, or this tulip."

"But it's very rare," returned the Curate, "and has some curious qualities. Don't let your bonnet hang over it Rosa, so as to screen it from the sun, or it will be longer in blowing."

After pretending a little more interest than she felt in the flower, just to gratify the Curate, she removed both her bonnet and herself from their neighbourhood without even asking its name, which, indeed, if told her, would have been forgotten in two minutes.

But the Curate remained absorbed in his opening flower. This was a kind of event in which he took vast interest—an event that had occupied a prominent place in his thoughts for many previous days and nights. Over this flower he had bent till his spine was getting stiffened like the joints of a Hindoo devotee, only moving as the moving sun threw his shadow on the object of his devotion.

Rosa ranged the garden after her own fashion, hopping into forbidden spots to admire, face to face, some retiring floral beauty that had caught her eye, and leaving two funny little footprints in the dark mould to show who had been the trespasser; going down on her hands and knees to smell some low-growing piece of painted sweetness; standing on tiptoe to pull down a creeper with the crook of her parasol; and taking tolls here and there, as flowers caught her fancy, to make up a tasteful little nosegay, flattering herself that Josiah would not miss them, though that avaricious horticulturist could have next day named every one that had disappeared from his shining hoards. A mother's delight in her children is uncertain and full of alloy compared with that of Josiah in his flowers. *They* never screamed when he wished them to be quiet—never required to be bribed to take physic—never tore their clothes, played truant, got bitten by mad dogs, nor gored by mad bulls—never, when they grew up, formed indiscreet attachments, or, at least, none such as a little patience would not remedy (as, for instance, when his stately convolvulus twined over a young piece of London-pride)—in fact, he enjoyed all the pleasures of parenthood without any of its anxieties.

By-and-by Josiah stood up and straightened his back, placing his hand in the hollow thereof to assist

the operation. Hearing Rosa chirping in a distant corner of his domain, he made off in that direction to join her.

"Don't scold, Josiah," said Rosa, holding up her spoils to his nose—"don't scold, and I'll stick one in your button-hole. There!"

"I never could," quoth Josiah, gazing regretfully down on the bud that now lent splendour to his coat—"I never could see any possible affinity between flowers and broadcloth; and why people should pluck blossoms from the stems and leaves that harmonise so well with them, to stick them into a dingy produce of the loom, is one of the puzzles of humanity."

"Why, it looks beautiful there," said Rosa, drawing him round, full-front, by the lapel of his coat. "You shall have just such another to go into the pulpit with next Sunday, and your text shall be, 'Man is cut down like a flower of the field,' or the verse about Solomon and the lilies."

"Puss!" said Josiah, pinching her small ear. "You resemble the lilies yourself in one point of view, inasmuch as you toil not, neither do you spin. Do you think human beings ought to be content with merely blooming, you idle child?"

"But I couldn't be useful if I tried," said Rosa. "And, do you know, that, although it's my duty, of course, to improve my mind, yet it makes my

head ache sadly. But I'm almost forgetting what it was brought me down here, and now it's nearly time to go back. So sit down on this bench, Josiah, and I'll tell you all about it, though I know you'll say I'm a little gossip for my pains. Something so interesting, too!—oh, so interesting!”

Josiah sat down on a garden-seat, and Rosa placed herself by his side.

“What is this great piece of news, child?” asked the Curate. “Have you got any new article of dress? or have you heard from home? or what is it?”

“Something much more important,” said Rosa, laying her flowers in a loose heap in her lap, “and something much more interesting to you. What would you say, now, if I told you that a certain friend of yours and mine, whom we are both very partial to, was plainly and undeniably attached to a certain gentleman that you take particular interest in?”

The Curate had taken off his hat for coolness, and at this piece of intelligence, delivered in a meaning tone, the blush which spread over his face might be seen reappearing, from under his hair, on the bald part of his head, making it look so red that one might have fancied an Indian had scalped him. For who could this friend of Rosa's

and his be except Lady Lee? and who could the gentleman, so oracularly alluded to, be, except—himself?

Such was his first thought; but then came another, that set his heart beating violently; and the blood rushing down from his face, to see what all the knocking was about, left him very white. What if she alluded to some other than himself! a thought which he had never yet looked at face to face, but which was now, perhaps, about to reveal itself to his shrinking soul. He said nothing, because he knew his voice would fail him; and Rosa, not noticing his disorder, because she was busy arranging her nosegay, taking loose flowers from her lap, and placing them where she thought they would appear to best advantage, went on:—

“Orelia and I have often wished that such a thing would come to pass, but we never expected it would for all that. For you know, Josiah, that Lady Lee” —(Ah, ’twas she, then—and he had, in one instance, guessed rightly)—“that Lady Lee has cared so little about the society of any other gentleman—except you”—(Rosa’s words here were almost drowned in the loud beating of the Curate’s expectant heart, and the rush of his thoughts—it was like hearing a person talk as you stood by a cataract);—“and, besides, we had so little hope of ever seeing anybody

at all worthy of her, that it seemed altogether too good to be true. But I really think nothing could have turned out better ; and you," added Rosa, looking meaningly up at him, "you, I'm sure, will think so too."

Would any one suppose, now (so ran the Curate's thought)—would any one suppose, now, that this little girl, his sister, seated so quietly and so innocently beside him, was inflicting on him terrible torture?—stretching him on the rack? What evil spirit possessed her, that she could not speak out? He knew a word from him would cause her to do so ; yet, for all the world, he could not speak that word. However, the discovery came soon enough.

"You see, to be worthy of her, Josiah, a lover must be clever—handsome"—(nodding affirmatively at each word)—"well-bred—agreeable—and one she could look up to. All these perfections, and one more, without which *I* should never have thought him complete, and that is, that he is a friend of yours, are met together in Captain Fane."

For a short space after these words were spoken, the Curate's heart went on beating rapidly, because, at the pace it was going, nothing short of absolute overthrow and breakdown could abruptly check it. But it sobered down at every pulsation—the intervals grew longer—longer—the swarm of thoughts

which had rushed to their common centre, thus suddenly dismissed, flew hither and thither, with loud buzzing and confusion ; and, then, as they folded their wings, there ensued in his heart a dead silence. Rosa went on talking, but what meaning her words had, or whether any, he did not know.

Presently his ideas, one by one, began to return. Not for him, then (this was the first), not for him was to be the peaceful happy future he had promised himself—not for him was to be prolonged the delightful present. The idea of Lady Lee had so entwined itself with all his hopes, prospects, and pursuits, that to attempt to disentangle it would be destruction to the pattern.

He looked up at his parsonage, a few yards in front of him, where he had led such a quiet, sheltered life, with scarcely a care to disturb him ; and shuddered to mark how dreary and deserted it looked, as if the Lares had forsaken it. He looked round at his flowers,—their beauty was gone ; that particular one whose blowing he had watched caught his eye : what a fool he had been ! while he was intent only on that miserable, worthless flower, his happiness, his very life, were slipping from beneath him.

“ Don't you think so, Josiah ? ” asked Rosa petu-

lantly ; for she had put the same question three times without an answer.

“Think what?” inquired the rapt Curate.

“Why, that it is a great pity any misunderstanding should exist between them. For I’ve noticed that Hester’s coldness to him, these last two or three days, is painful to both of them ; and I’m certain it is nothing but what could be set right in a moment. And you, Josiah, are the very person to set it right. You must speak to Hester—you must, indeed—and give her good advice. You might say to both of them what they wouldn’t perhaps say to each other. So, Josiah, if you’ll step up this evening, and I’m sure you’ve nothing better to do, I’ll take care you shall talk to her alone. There” (kissing him), “good-by for the present. I see I’ve set you thinking, and I know you’ll think to good purpose.”

Set him thinking!—yes; but far different thoughts from those she supposed. Was it not enough that his happiness had been trodden down, scattered to the winds, without a thought for him; but he must now be called to the assistance of the spoiler? It was like asking the shepherd to give to the robber his pet lamb. No: if there was misunderstanding between those two, it was none of his making ;

he even felt a secret pleasure in it. Let them set it right themselves! He had been admitted to no share in their counsels—he would take no part in their reconciliation!

Thoughts such as these were too new to the gentle mind of the Curate to present themselves without causing great perturbation. The sun, that shone at first on his back, moved to his left shoulder, yet still he sat there—a passing shower drenched him, yet still he sat there—till the long shadows swept over him, and the sun went down upon his anger.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OF late this has, I regret to find, spite of all my efforts to the contrary, begun to assume somewhat the appearance of a love-story. And even a love-story might bear a novel, unhackneyed aspect, if a man might write it truly, without fear of getting his eyes scratched out; showing Cupid, not in his accustomed genial, smiling phase, but as an infernal imp-deity, shooting other divinities with poisoned arrows.

For, look at the Curate Josiah as we first saw him—simple, affectionate, true, self-denying—receiving, with open heart, the friend of his youth! That friend has done nothing to deserve loss of friendship; yet, at the explosion of the secret mine that this pleasant, comical, harmless, winged boy has laid in his heart, this ancient, firm-rooted friendship is scattered to the winds, and the seat of it becomes a blackened ruin.

And, setting jealousy aside, friendship still suffers by love. None but a bachelor knows what it is to be a friend, or, perchance, to have one. For, though you shall have been intimate with a man from youth upwards—though you shall have shared together pleasures and dangers—bandied thoughts to and fro, like shuttle-cocks, by many a jovial, else solitary, fireside—yet let the idol of a three days' fancy intervene, and the tried friend's image fades: let marriage ensue, and the memory of those ancient times goes for nothing, strangled by this new close tie. Doubtless the old Templars knew this, and took a vow of celibacy, less on monastic grounds than that they might, as brothers, be faithful to one another.

The Curate had at length, at the summons of Jennifer, withdrawn into his sitting-room. There he sat in the dusk, in his accustomed chair—not lounging supinely, as usual, but leaning forward, supporting his elbows on his knees, his face on his closed hands—and so busy with his thoughts, that he did not notice the steps of a horse that came down the road and paused at the parsonage; nor the footstep of the rider as he crossed the gravel path; nor the opening of the door. Only when a hand was laid on his shoulder he started, and looked up. There, in the gloom, stood the tall form of his

late friend—of him whose image he had been, for the last few hours, chipping and defacing—the form of Fane.

“Josey, my boy,” said Fane, “I come to you, not, as usual, because I want a little pleasant companionship, a little revival of old times, but because I want a friend’s counsel, or, at any rate, his ear, and that on more points than one.”

Good heavens! (thought the Curate) did they take him for a stone, a log of wood? Was he, then, to preside at the partition of his own heart? Was he to throw feelings, affections, hopes, into the choked furnace, in order that the statue of Love, made by other hands, should run freely into the mould, and come to light in perfection? Too much! too much!

“First,” said Fane, “to speak on a subject you are already partly acquainted with. You remember what I have told you about the disinherited cousin to whose place in my uncle’s affections I have succeeded?”

The Curate was relieved to find the subject on which his attention was required different from what he expected, and answered at once, that he remembered all the particulars.

“I believe I have succeeded in discovering my cousin,” said Fane.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Curate, with interest somewhat awakened in spite of himself.

"Yes," said Fane, "but I have detected him only at the very moment he has eluded my grasp. To-day I went to a silversmith's in Doddington to give directions about the inscription on a silver cup which we were about to present, in token of esteem, to the dragoon Onslow, who was hurt in the steeple-chase the other day, and who has since quitted the service—a token well-merited, both by his soldierly conduct and his skill in horsemanship, by which the regiment has been much benefited. On the counter was lying, when I entered, a ring of curious chasing and construction. I recognised it in a moment for the same I had lately observed on the finger of this very dragoon Onslow, when he was lying sick at the lodge. I took it up to look at the device on the stone. There I beheld the Levitts' family crest (my cousin is a Levitt, you know)—rather a peculiar crest—a hand grasping a thunderbolt, with the motto—'*Downright.*' 'Where did you get this?' I asked the silversmith. 'It was sent him the day before,' he told me, 'to be sold for whatever he might choose to give for it, and with it came a gold watch.' This, too, he showed me: it had inside the case the initials L. L. 'Who brought these?' I asked the silversmith. 'The messenger,' he said, 'was

the daughter of the landlord of the Grapes.' That, I knew, was the inn where Onslow had been billeted, and thither I repaired. There," continued Fane, "I found great tribulation in the household. The landlord's daughter, Susan, when she heard my errand, could hardly speak for crying, so piteous was the subject. Her mother, the landlady, told me the watch and ring had come from Onslow, with a request that they might be sold for what they would fetch, and that the amount of his bill at the Grapes might be deducted from the proceeds. 'But, Lord love him, Captain,' said the good landlady, 'the little he had here he was welcome to, and should have been if it had been twice as much; so I sent him the whole £12, 10s. that the watchmaker gave. But I'd better have kept my bill, as he told me, for he sent back two keepsakes for me and my daughter, that must have cost him near half his money.' Well, Josey, I had already bought the ring from the watchmaker—see, here it is—and I rode at once to the Heronry lodge, planning all the way how I should disclose myself—how I should surprise my cousin with my knowledge of his secret, and make him accept my services in his behalf. But, Josey, 'the best laid plans of mice and men oft gang a-ga'e.' The bird had flown. This very afternoon he had set out to catch the Doddington

coach at a cross-road, having previously sent the solitary trunk that contained his effects thither to await him; and it had no direction on it. Nobody knows where he has gone."

"And how do you propose to find him?" asked the Curate.

"I should have followed in pursuit of him at once," replied Fane, "but for two considerations. One was, that I had not as yet got leave of absence—the other, that some other business, even yet nearer my heart, remained to be settled, before I could depart in peace. Ah, Josey! now I come to the great question; and now, indeed, I need your counsel!"

The cloud that had for a moment been uplifted from the Curate's soul, again descended black and heavy. He made no response; but Fane was too much occupied with his own thoughts to heed that, and went on, after a pause—

"Josey," he said, "to you, who know me so well, I need not unfold my inner man. You know that it is my way to show only the surface of my nature. You know that, while fully sensible of the value of fine sentiment, enthusiasm, and deep feeling, I shrink from displaying them on ordinary occasions, as Queen Godiva shrunk from the gaze of Coventry. Well, Josey, though one may thus freeze over the

surface of life, yet the current of emotion sweeps none the less powerfully underneath. I have long perceived that I was letting many of my best faculties run to waste, while I employed others comparatively valueless—and all the time life slipping on—on. Heavens, Josey! if I go on in this way, I may become petrified into one of those unhappy veterans who have but two sources of enjoyment—port wine and the newspaper—to set against their accumulating miseries. What, for instance, do I know of many of the feelings which sway civilised man? I've no more idea of home than a Bedouin Arab. And while treating lightly my uncle's advice to marry, I knew he was right."

He paused, and presently resumed. "But then I am so fastidious, so hard to be moved to admire, that 'twas no wonder I set out on this matrimonial expedition with small hopes of success. Conceive, then, Josey, my discomfiture, when, as in the case of my cousin, which I have told you of, so also in this, I discover what I sought only at the moment it seems lost to me."

Again he paused—the Curate did not speak, and Fane went on. "I need not speak to you, her friend, Josey, of the attractions of Lady Lee"—(the Curate almost groaned)—"I need not say how all in her seems made for my admiration, while there is no-

thing to offend my unhappy fastidiousness. I will just say, Josey, that, though I do not deny to have felt passing fancies for other women, yet I never met one but her with whom I could be, not merely content, but eager to pass my life. And yet, as I tell you, the moment of my making this discovery is far from a moment of hope; for I make it just as Lady Lee begins to treat me with the most unaccountable reserve—reserve that would repel me, did I not see it relieved by sudden, short intervals of sympathy and relenting. Now, Josey, to-morrow I set off in pursuit of my cousin, and my stay will, perhaps, be too long for my patience under uncertainty; so I am resolved, before going, to learn my fate at the Heronry to-morrow morning. You being at once my old friend and her intimate acquaintance, I now come to ask you frankly if, knowing her as you do, you are aware of any reason why she should have thus reversed her behaviour to me? Is she attached to any one else?"

"I am not aware," answered the Curate, shortly, and in a strange voice.

"Are there any family reasons why she should reject me? You see, Josey, I am anxious so to shape my course to-morrow as to depart with a certainty of some sort. I will insure success if I can. If that be out of the question, I wish to avoid refusal."

"I know of no family reasons," answered the Curate, dryly, as before.

"You cannot, then, as my friend and hers, throw out any light for my guidance. Remember, if she were an ordinary woman, her conduct might be set down to coquettish caprice; but, with her, all little motives are out of the question."

"It is a matter," said the Curate, making an effort to speak when he observed that Fane, looking anxiously at him, seemed to demand a reply—"it is a matter in which I cannot advise. This is the first confidence you have thought proper to repose in me on the subject, and your demand for counsel is, therefore, scarcely reasonable."

"But it is only within these three days I have been fairly apprised of my own feelings," said Fane, who wondered at Josiah's unexpected want of sympathy, yet little suspected its cause.

"May be so," said the Curate, steeling himself against argument; "but this is a delicate subject, on which every man ought to think and act for himself."

"Perhaps you are right," said Fane, adding, with a half smile, "but I never expected to hear such advice from you to me. I have come upon you in an unlucky moment. Well, Josey, I will, as you somewhat stoically recommend, trust to myself only to-morrow.

But I must not forget what was, after all, perhaps, the main object of my coming to-night. This morning I had a letter from my uncle, on a subject I have often mentioned to him. A living in his gift has long been expected to fall vacant—at last the incumbent has obligingly taken himself off, and my uncle now writes to offer it to you. It is worth between £300 and £400 a-year; but you will not eat the bread of idleness, Josey, for the parish is in such a heathenish state, from neglect, that your apostolic virtues will be fully taxed for years to come.”

The Curate was confounded. Fane was heaping coals of fire on his head, and the pain was insufferable, till they were suddenly quenched by a thought which his unsuspecting nature would never have originated except under the influence of such a suggestive passion as jealousy. Perhaps (he thought), perhaps this living was meant as a bribe or compensation for his compliance; or perhaps it was a scheme for getting him out of the way. He put the letter, which Fane offered, aside. “I could not accept the offer, Durham.”

“Not accept it!” echoed Fane. “Some scruple that would never have entered any head but yours. You will have a better garden than your present one, Josey.”

"I cannot accept it," replied the Curate; "or, plainer still, I will not."

Fane stepped quickly away to the door. "Some fatality pursues me," he said, petulantly. "One causeless estrangement follows another." The door was already open when he turned back. "Josey," he said, "I shall not see you again before I go, and you and I have been friends too long to part uneasily for a hasty word or a flash of ill temper. I am hurt less by your present absence of friendliness, than by the injury done to my ideal by thus seeing you under an unfavourable aspect. Josey, I wouldn't have been so disappointed for more than I can say; but you will be sorry to-morrow, and I'll try to forget it before I come back again. God bless you. Good-by."

He took the Curate's passive hand, pressed it, and left the room. As he went, the Curate's mental eye turned judicially inward upon himself, and he stood in his own presence like a criminal.

The reaction which follows a sense of having acted unworthily is, in a nature like the Curate's, quick and violent. Reproaches from Fane would have hardened him, and he might have brazened out his conduct even to himself for a short time; but his resentment had melted, his firmness had deserted him, and he was left with no better company than remorse.

Acting on his new impulse, he flew out of the house, calling after his friend. "Durham!" he shouted—"Durham! one word!" The only answer was the echo of the horse's hoofs as Fane galloped up the road.

Breathless and bareheaded, the Curate returned to the house. The older pain was deadened in the acuteness of this new self-inflicted wound, and seemed, in comparison, light and bearable. He remembered Fane's remarks, of a few days before, as to the expediency of being aware of our hidden nature, and he shuddered at the glimpse of some qualities of his own thus revealed to him.

While considering what speediest atonement he could make to Fane, the remembrance of Rosa's suggestion suddenly occurred to him. Even now she was perhaps expecting him to enter the Heronry on his peace-making mission. He would go—yes, he would go, and confess all to Hester—tell her of his friend's doubts—entreat her, at all cost to himself, not to throw away such a heart as Fane's—and thus prove the sincerity of his repentance. He would go, too, on the instant, for he felt he could not sleep till he had discharged some of the accumulating pressure on his soul.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LADY LEE and her two young friends were seated together in the library, her ladyship and Orelia ostensibly occupied in reading, though Rosa, peeping up now and then from a cushion she was embroidering, noticed that the eyes of both of them often wandered from the page. Nay, Lady Lee had at last become so openly and unreservedly absent in mind, that she had let the book fall on her lap, while her eyes were fixed on a blank space in the wall in front of her. "What a thing it is to be in love!" thought Rosa.

Several tokens of the recent presence of Julius were scattered about the room. A broken-down musical coach, with one wheel, stood in a corner—the pieces of a dissected map lay on the table—and, near them, the tin trumpet bought for him at the fair, on which he was accustomed to perform a good deal, with more delight to himself than to his

hearers. His favourite toy—a musket which, by means of a spring, discharged its ramrod with great effect, and which caused a general nervousness to pervade the household—was not, however, among the rest, for he never could be prevailed upon to retire to bed without it, and always slept with the weapon by his side, as if he expected housebreakers every moment. Pick was asleep on the sofa, embracing his two hind legs and his tail in his arms, like a small faggot.

Rosa, watching for her brother's arrival, heard his step in the hall, and darted out upon him.

Josiah's entrance did not excite much notice, because he was accustomed to walk in and out at all hours, more like one of the family than a visitor. He cast an anxious glance at Lady Lee—fidgeted about the room for a while—took up things from the table and laid them down again—and then looked meaningly at Rosa.

"Orelia," whispered Rosa to that young lady, "I think Josiah has a little secret to tell Hester. Come with me to the drawing-room," and she and Orelia left the library.

The Curate went and leaned over the back of Lady Lee's chair. "Hester," he said, "I come here as a penitent."

"As a penitent, Josiah!" exclaimed her lady-

ship, half raising herself, and turning to look at him.

"Sit still—don't look at me," said the Curate, "and I shall say what I have to say more easily." He paused a little, and went on. "I must make haste to confess, or I know not what delirium may next seize me. I have caught glimpses of myself to-day that have made me shudder, and put me actually in fear of myself; even on my way here, I was tempted to turn back and keep a shameful silence"—and the poor Curate passed his hand irresolutely across his forehead. "Why should I tell you I have always thought you charming? Why say that for years I have had no pleasant thoughts, hopes, or prospects, of which your idea has not, unconsciously to myself, formed the groundwork?" ("Good heavens!" thought Lady Lee, half starting from her chair, as these words were uttered in a mournful, trembling voice, "what has come to Josiah?—he must be crazy!") "You must know this as well as I; and whether you do or not, the recital would not be interesting to you. For these thoughts I do not ask any indulgence, though I am sure you will not view them with contempt or harshness. But I do ask your sympathy, when I tell you that, suddenly, without warning, and while

sunning myself securely in your friendship, I became aware that the interest which I would have given the world to inspire in you, was aroused for another."

"Josiah!" said her ladyship, in a severe tone. "Mr Young! are you not a little passing the limits of friendship?"

The Curate laid his hand gently on her shoulder. "Surely you know me well enough to feel that I would not give you unnecessary pain," he said. "I do not come here to plead my own hopeless, abandoned cause, nor to indulge in any repinings, but to repair, if possible, a great fault. In the anger and pain of disappointment, I have repelled the kindness of my best friend. Of all the men I have known, none have ever so commanded my admiration and respect, and roused my warmest feelings, as Durham Fane. Yet, though he more than returned those feelings, I have, within this hour past, treated him with shameful ingratitude."

Lady Lee felt thankful that the Curate had posted himself behind her, for she would now have been as unwilling to encounter his gaze as he was to meet hers.

"I was not only ungrateful," continued Josiah, "but false to my own settled idea. There was nothing I believed in more firmly than the worth of my friend Durham. He was in all things my supe-

rior ; he was my model of excellence. Since we were boys at school together I have thought this of him ; and yet all this afternoon I have been hating him—hating him, Hester—and for what ? Because he loves one, of whose love he is far worthier than I."

The Curate made a pause. Lady Lee did not speak.

"When I have read of the actions of the passions in dramas and novels, which are extolled as displaying the secrets of the heart," he went on, "I have either considered sudden revulsions and contrasts of feeling, depicted in the same individual, impossible fictions, or, at any rate, true only of characters with which I, the reader, had nothing in common. But I have learned my mistake. I feel that circumstances might make me a criminal as great as any of my poorest, most abandoned brethren. God forgive me ! if a wish could have killed Durham this day, he might now be lifeless, slain by his friend. Even now, I might still be the sport of such feelings, had not his own generous act restored me to myself."

Again the Curate paused.

"He has seen with pain, for some days past, an alteration in your conduct to him, Hester. He knows, as I and all who know *you* must know, that this springs from no trivial or wanton cause."

"I cannot explain it," said Lady Lee, hastily.

"Not to me," said Josiah—"not to me; I do not seek to divine it; that is not my object. But you must explain it to him."

"And how can I do so unasked?" said Lady Lee.

"Hester, to-morrow Durham leaves us for a while in the discharge of a necessary duty—to seek his missing cousin, of whom he has found traces. Before he goes, he will come to you to learn his fate. You must be open with him, Hester. You must not cast away such a man as Durham for a scruple. I wish I could do him justice; I wish I could describe him as he is."

"It is not necessary," faintly murmured Lady Lee.

That confession of hers was a sharp pang for the Curate. Perhaps some latent hope may have existed in his heart, that, after all, she was not attached to Fane—who knows?—or if it were so, who shall cast the first stone at him? If there were such a hope, it vanished at her words, and the Curate went on gallantly.

"You must be frank with him, Hester; do not let any scrupulous feelings prevent you from confiding everything to him. For consider what is at stake. If the whole world were given you to choose from, I do not believe you could find another more worthy of you in himself, nor more fit to make you happy. Perhaps if, without warning, he had asked

you for explanation, it might have been withheld. But now I will trust that to-morrow I may have the satisfaction of knowing that my words of to-night have had their influence. In thus advising you I have done some penance—I have indeed; but it leaves no smart behind—rather bringing present relief. Think well of what I have said, Hester; think well, too, of what you will say to Durham to-morrow. And now, good night.”

Lady Lee rose from her chair—put her handkerchief to her eyes—and withdrew it.

“Poor Josiah!” she said.

She held out her hand, but whether the Curate could not trust himself to take it, or whether he had made a vow of self-mortification, or from whatever cause it might be, he pretended not to notice the action; and, shaking his head as he repeated, “Good night, good night,” went out, without looking at her.

“Have you managed it nicely, Josiah?” asked Rosa, meeting him in the hall.

“I have done my best, my child—honestly done my best,” said the poor Curate.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FANE was seated at breakfast next morning in his rooms at the Bush, while his servant was packing his portmanteau, to be ready for the afternoon coach, by which he designed to follow on the track of Onslow.

His breakfasting was mere matter of form, for the thought of the approaching interview with Lady Lee occupied his mind, and made him anxious. Fane, the steely-hearted, whose breast had hitherto been proof alike against the open attacks of brilliant, dashing females, and the more formidable attempts of the insidious and meek order of sirens, was for the first time in love. For the first time in his life, a woman had spoiled his appetite, broken his sleep, and filled his mind with conflicting thoughts of her ; being one moment inspired with hope by the recollections of some gleams of favour, the next reduced to despair, by recalling some instances of discouragement. These last, too, had seemed so evidently

intentional on the part of her ladyship, that he did not like to dwell on the events of the last two or three days—instantively preferring the brighter prospect afforded by a previous era in their acquaintance.

Few would have been readier than Fane to extract matter of amusement and sarcasm from the spectacle now presented by himself. A fine handsome fellow with good digestive apparatus, rejecting muffin, despising the consolations of grill, and leaving his coffee untouched, while his thoughts wandered doubtfully around the shrine of a goddess—it would have made him witty for a week. Yet he did not feel in the least inclined to look at the present case in that light—no gleam of the humorous lightened his meditations. His feelings were none the less strong for being rational. He felt that he had, for the first time, seen a woman whom his judgment and imagination alike approved—without whom his life would be saddened—whom he was about to ask to be the partner of it, and with strong doubts of success. So that the experienced reader will perceive that, with the exception of the article of judgment, which does not perhaps invariably volunteer its sanction on these occasions, his state of mind did not materially differ from that of the generality of anxious lovers.

To him, thus rapt and neglectful of his victuals,

there entered Captain Sloperton. More congenial company than Sloperton's would just then have been distasteful to Fane, and he heartily wished the essenced Captain drowned, like a modern Clarence, in a butt of his own favourite bouquet. The Captain glanced slightly at the untasted breakfast, returned Fane's half-absent greeting by a nod and a sweet smile, and seated himself near the table.

"I saw your name in orders for leave last night," he remarked presently. "Rather a sudden bolt, isn't it?"

"I did not know till yesterday that I should want leave," returned Fane.

"Nothing of a melancholy nature, I hope?" inquired the Captain, with a sympathetic air.

"No—merely some family business," said Fane, shortly.

"I was afraid," said Sloperton, smoothing his mustache with the point of his fore-finger, "it might be some respectable aunt, or venerable grandfather, who had suddenly quitted the scene. If they had forgotten to leave you a legacy, of course the occasion would have been one of unmixed sorrow. And when do you start, my dear fellow?"

"By the five o'clock coach, this afternoon," answered Fane.

"By the five o'clock coach, this afternoon!"

repeated Sloperton. "And, in the mean time, you are going to take leave of your friends? I saw your horse waiting below."

Fane did not answer, thinking, perhaps, that his leavetakings were no affair of Sloperton's. The latter was thus confirmed in his surmise that Fane projected a visit to the Heronry, and he also guessed the object of that visit. He had, indeed, unbounded confidence in his own merits; but he also had an unwilling respect for Fane, and an occasional suspicion had crossed him that his rival's mind and tastes harmonised better than his own with her ladyship's, though he never doubted (especially since Bagot and Kitty Fillett had confirmed his opinion) that the balance of fascination was altogether on his own side. However, though he considered his place in her ladyship's affections as perfectly secure, yet Fane's visits had given him some little secret uneasiness; and he had therefore noticed, with a great deal of pleasure, the late apparent coolness between them. Bagot, acting upon Seager's advice, had explained this coolness entirely to Sloperton's satisfaction, while at the same time he showed him that the rivalry was not imaginary. Seeing Fane's leave of absence announced in the order-book, he fancied his rival was quitting the scene in despair, and he now came to verify this supposition. If it were so, perhaps

Fane might be meditating a parting visit, to try his luck in a desperate throw for the stakes. "If so," said Sloperton to himself, "'twill be charity to let him know he hasn't the shadow of a chance. It's what I should like to have explained to myself, if his case were mine. I should consider it painful, of course—rather; but friendly—very. And an interview between them *can* do *him* no good, and will perhaps unsettle *her* for a day or two. Decidedly 'twill be friendly to stop it."

Such, he fancied, were the real grounds for the measure he had resolved on. But vanity at having prevailed against one whose rivalry he had so much reason to fear, joined with a somewhat ungenerous wish to enjoy his own triumph, had more influence than he imagined; while deep below all lurked a fear that Fane, in a fair field, might prevail.

"Do you know, old fellow," he said with charming frankness, "I was afraid at one time that you were going to interfere with me in a certain quarter? I was, upon my life. You see, you don't usually pay particular attentions anywhere: if you did, I shouldn't have thought anything of it; but you were deuced particular here—oh, deuced. Demmit, Fane, visits of three or four hours a-day regularly—'pon my life, it made me quite nervous, until I found the prize was my own."

"Prize! — what prize? — what are you talking about?" asked Fane, sternly.

"About our chances with a certain fair friend of ours," returned Sloperton, calmly. "Ah, Fane, my boy, take my word for it, there's nothing like a little experience with women to insure success in these things. I've been accustomed to affairs of the sort since I was—let me see—say about fifteen, or fourteen and a half—consequently you'll admit, my dear fellow, that if I bungled at this time of day, I might as well give up practice at once."

Fane was regarding him with a deepening frown. "If you have anything to say in which I am interested," he said, "oblige me by speaking out."

"No further interested, I think," said the other, waving his hand, "than as a friend of both parties, on whose congratulations I reckon; and I shouldn't now mention my own success, only that I have perceived, my dear fellow, within these few days, that you have dropt the pursuit yourself. But, as I said, I am an old hand at these things; and not content with being assured of my success with the lady, I've also secured another important party to the affair. Look at that, old fellow," he continued, drawing an envelope from his pocket, unfolding it, and handing the enclosed paper between his first and second fingers to Fane. Then returning to his old occupa-

tion of sleeking his mustache, he glanced from the corners of his eyelids at Fane's face as he read it; feeling, perhaps, a little exultation as he marked the change in his countenance.

For it certainly did change—first flushing deep red, and then paling, while his lips closed, and the circle of his eyes showed clear of the lids, as he read this paper. In it the writer gave “his full consent and approval to the marriage of Hester, relict of Sir Joseph Lee, Bart., with Cecil Sloperton, Esq., whenever the aforesaid parties should see fit to celebrate it.” It seemed formal and regular, and was signed “Bagot Lee.”

He read it over three or four times before he seemed to catch the meaning, though the wording was clear enough; then, laying it on the table, he rose and turned away to the window.

This, then, had been the cause of her altered treatment of him—she was engaged to Sloperton! The occasional relentings which he (soft fool as he was!) had set down to a far different cause, were mere glimpses of repentance from a consciousness that she had given him encouragement, led him on merely to trifle with him, while giving herself to another. Yes; it was the last solution he should ever have reached unassisted, but now it was clear as noonday.

Well! he had been a fool, an idiot, this once, but

it should be the last time. He would never again give a woman the power so to wound him. And yet how could he ever have guessed that she, Hester Lee (here her ladyship's noble, thoughtful face rose plainly before him)—how *could* he ever have guessed that she, of all women, would ever have been caught by the fair outside of such a man as Sloperton? And was a woman who could be so caught worthy of another thought from him?—no, he would cast her idea from his memory. An excellent and valiant resolution, Captain Fane—only so hard to keep.

Suddenly there came crowding upon him a vast number of memories—of smiles, of kind words, of glances; nay, the spirit of whole interviews and conversations, distilled, as it were, into a moment's space, flashed vividly across him, till he was bewildered by the recollections he had unconsciously stored up. He was roused from the contemplation of these by the voice of Sloperton.

“By the by, my dear fellow,” began the Captain, and then abruptly stopt, for Fane, turning suddenly at his voice, cast on him a glance that warned Sloperton he had better not trifle with him just now. Fane made no attempt to affect indifference: what did he care for the exultation of a man he despised?—why should he trouble himself to assume a disguise? what would have mattered to him just then

the opinions of the whole world, or the eyes of the whole world? He strode, without speaking, across the apartment, and passed into his sleeping-room. Sloperton, watching him, felt half sorry when he saw how strong was the emotion he had succeeded in creating. "He is hit rather hard," he said to himself. "Really 'tis a pity we both fancied the same woman. If I had thought he'd have taken it to heart so, I almost think I should have let him make the discovery for himself."

He heard Fane tell his servant, in a voice of forced steadiness, to finish the packing of his portmanteau immediately. He would go, not by the afternoon coach, but by the first one, which would pass in half an hour.

At this, Sloperton, leaving the room, descended to the street. Lounging there for a few minutes, he saw Fane's servant come down and tell the groom to lead his master's horse back to the stable. Satisfied that he had thus put an effectual stop to the projected visit, he then repaired to his lodgings.

These being situated near the hotel, he heard the coach drive up to the Bush, he saw the fresh horses, with their clothes on, pass up the street to be harnessed to it, and waited at the window till the sound of the bugle and the rumble of the wheels told him it had started. On the box-seat sat Fane, his hat

pulled down far on his forehead. Sloperton stood at the window ready to catch his eye and wave his hand to him, feeling quite benevolently disposed, just then, toward his defeated rival; but Fane did not look right or left.

"Come," said Sloperton to himself, "'tis better he's gone—it prevents bother and confusion. And, really, 'tis something to be proud of to cut out a fellow like that—I shall think the better of myself for it;" which, however, would have been quite superfluous, if not impossible.

Fane, meantime, as he left Doddington* behind him, was resolute to root the memory of Lady Lee from his mind. It was thrust out at one point only to enter at another. It was suggested incessantly by thoughts apparently the most foreign to it. He tried to talk to the coachman, and to attend to his remarks; the coachman, knowing he was talking to what he was pleased to call "a cavalry gent," immediately began to enlarge on the merits of the grey filly that officiated as his off-leader. The grey filly instantly suggested Diana, and the transition from Diana to her fair mistress was short and easy. Then he asked about the different country-seats they passed—but he remembered to have seen pictures of most of them in a history of the county in the library at the Heronry—and he thought of her who was then

perhaps seated in that library, till he was enraged at the complacency with which he still dwelt on the image. It started up from all manner of odd corners and nooks of his mind—put by there, just as a miser hides some of his guineas in a teapot or an old stocking.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IF Fane had been nervous and anxious that morning, Lady Lee had been far more so. Absence of mind—incoherent replies—starts as the door opened, and quick anxious glances towards it, all told the observant Rosa who was expected. Therefore, soon after breakfast, Rosa coaxed Orelia out for a walk, leaving her ladyship alone in the library.

Eleven o'clock came—the earliest hour at which she thought it probable Fane would come. A book was open on the table before her, but she had read the same page over about fifty times, with no more idea of the meaning of it on the fifty-first reading than before she commenced. Every noise in the hall made her start—once a step was heard which, though as unlike Fane's as it well could be, she persisted in believing must be his: it was short,

quick, and apparently advancing at a run, and was followed by an impatient and ineffectual fumbling at the handle of the door, lasting for upwards of a minute, when the door opened, and the mountain was delivered of that very ridiculous mouse Julius. This young gentleman was very abruptly dismissed, and shortly afterwards a more manly step was heard—it was the footman with some stupid message—how she hated the man!—people must create these false alarms merely to annoy her—and yet even these were preferable, she thought, to unbroken expectation.

Twenty times in a quarter of an hour she looked at her watch—as often at the little gold clock which two ivory angels held between them on the mantelpiece—twenty times she applied herself anew to her page, and read it over without the faintest conception of what it was about. She was thinking, all the time, of the explanation she should give Fane—how she could best screen Bagot, and how soften his apparent hatred of Fane, till it should appear only a mere whimsical prejudice. For though, since their late nocturnal interview, her indifference for the Colonel had been converted into positive dislike, yet she somehow wished to throw the conduct of her relation into as favourable a light as it would admit of.

She wondered how Fane would take what she had to tell him—whether he would listen to reason—whether he would attempt to argue, or submit at once to what was inevitable—or (but this thought was only allowed to flit dimly across her mind, and was never fairly brought up for inspection)—or whether he would suggest any mode of appeasing Bagot.

Twelve o'clock came—this suspense was hard to bear! A nervous flush had fixed itself on her cheek—she felt a strong impulse to start from her chair and hurry to the window, or out of the room, or anywhere, for a moment's change, but sat still nevertheless. Half-past twelve: an embroidery frame was near her—she resolved to do a certain number of stitches, and then go to the window: she did so; went to the window, loitered there, and returned to do some more stitches, this time increasing the number by ten. This got over the time till one o'clock; and, shortly after, her ear caught the tramp of a horse on the gravel. It would have been easy to go to the window and see who this was, but she couldn't do it; because it might not be him, after all, and she wished to prolong her hope. The horse stopped at the southern entrance; Fane usually dismounted there. She heard the servant go to the door—what could he mean by going so slowly—why didn't the creature

run? She heard him precede the visitor along the hall—they reached the door of the library—it was opened, and she put her hand before her eyes, bending them on her embroidery, and stooped forward to conceal her flutter; and the servant, in a perfectly calm and equable tone, announced——Captain Sloperton.

The Captain entered with rather more than the usual amount of melancholy sweetness in his aspect. He saw her start at his name—he saw the deep flush on her face turn to unusual paleness as he approached—he felt her hand tremble as he took it, and noticed, too, a tremor in her voice. And the Captain, in the plenitude of his pride and power, felt a mixture of exultation and pity in the thought that his presence could occasion such decided and interesting emotion. She had concealed her feelings cleverly enough hitherto—but he had known—yes, he had been perfectly certain, even before that jewel of a girl, Fillett, had told him the true state of affairs—that Lady Lee couldn't keep up the farce long: gad, sir, he had half a mind to punish her hypocrisy by affecting indifference in his turn—'twould serve her right; but no, he would strike while the iron was hot, and while he was flushed with his success at having got rid of Fane; yes, he would push his advantage at once, and settle the business.

Never had the Captain's voice been more softly seductive, or his eyes more expressive, than when, gently pressing Lady Lee's hand, and retaining it as long as he was allowed (which wasn't very long), he said, "How is my fair cousin to-day?" The Captain was fond of alluding to the relationship—it gave him the right to appear a little more intimate than others ; and while taking a chair near her, and placing his hat on the table, he continued to regard her with a sad, serious air, which he did not doubt was inexpressibly affecting.

She felt dreadfully impatient : first, there was the disappointment ; next, the Captain's leisurely manner indicated that his visit might not be a short one ; and, if Fane should come while he was here, the opportunity so watched and longed for might be lost. But that must not be ; she would be as cold to Captain Sloperton as possible — even uncivil, if necessary, rather than suffer the chance of that. Nothing could well be farther from the thoughts of the ill-starred Sloperton than the idea that his presence was unwelcome. "I'll give her a little time to collect herself, poor thing," he thought ; —so he said aloud, motioning gracefully towards the open book on the table, "May I ask the subject of your studies ?"

Lady Lee took the book from the table, and handed it to him for answer.

"Ah,—*Corinne*," he said ; "a love-tale. Do you know," said the Captain, turning towards her with charming confidence—"do you know, I'm so glad you've been reading a love-tale. If I had been asked by any one on my road hither, How would you like to find your cousin employed? I should have answered, By all means in reading *Corinne*."

"Still a little fluttered," thought the Captain, glancing at her, as she bit her lip and made a slight gesture of impatience.

"I am enchanted, too, at finding you alone," went on Sloperton. "Your two young friends are charming girls, my dear cousin, yet I should never have forgiven their presence to-day."

Lady Lee turned her face quickly towards him with a look of surprise—snatching at the same moment her hand (which he offered to take) hastily away.

The Captain was not the best-tempered man in the world—"Really," he said, affecting to smile, while he turned scarlet with anger—"really, if you are so cruel, I shall be driven to imitate our friend Fane, who went by the coach this morning."

Went by the coach this morning! He was gone, then—she should not see him, and there would be

no explanation. Unkind, not to give her one chance of doing herself justice ! She wished her visitor would leave her that she might cry.

Such were her thoughts ;—but Sloperton, doomed to accumulate upon his devoted head, that morning, the largest amount of her displeasure that his evil genius could procure him, misinterpreted her silence and agitation. He thought her emotion proceeded from his threat of leaving her.

“You must not always take me at my word,” he said, smiling more enchantingly than ever. “Do you not know—are you not now in your heart perfectly convinced that it would be utterly impossible for me to leave you ? What has brought me so constantly to the Heronry but my inability to exist except in your presence ? What brings me here now, except to declare the fact ? My dear cousin !—may I hope that title will soon be exchanged for a nearer one ?”

Nothing could exceed the calm confidence with which the Captain uttered this speech. He spoke it as if it were a mere matter of form, rendered necessary by female prejudice, but insignificant in itself. Lady Lee rose from her chair, and seemed to her astounded wooer to look down upon him from an immeasurable height, while she addressed him.

“And your intention in coming here to-day,” she said, “was really, then, to make this declaration?”

The Captain, utterly confounded by her look and voice, only replied by a bow, laying, at the same time, his hand upon his heart, with some diminution of his customary grace.

She was too vexed to be sarcastic, or perhaps his rejection might have been conveyed with some little scorn of language as well as of look. And, indeed, it was not without difficulty that she repressed her impatience at being, at such a juncture, fooled with the very counterfeit and caricature of passion.

So she repeated, “And you really came here to say this!”

“Is it so very incredible?” asked the Captain, beginning to feel an uneasy doubt as to his ultimate success.

“I hear it with pain and surprise,” she said. “The idea is so new that it startles me.”

“Compose yourself,” said the Captain, soothingly. “However charming it might be to hear your consent uttered in words, I would not distress you for the world. Let silence convey it.”

“No,” said Lady Lee—“no! I must not leave you in doubt. I must not leave any opening for

a renewal of the subject. I thank you, but it is impossible."

Sloperton stretched out his hand towards hers. He had a whole battery of arguments and looks and sighs in reserve. But she drew back from him hastily.

"You must not persist," she said, in a severe tone; "I am altogether in earnest." This, however, the infatuated wooer could not believe. "Ah!" he thought, "I've been a little too abrupt, and that's what makes her restive;—women like a touch of sentiment in these matters."

"My plainness," said he, "has offended you, but 'twas all owing to the sincerity of my passion" (Lady Lee's lip curled at the word). "Pray ascribe it to that," he went on, "and believe that I am filled with the most rapturous sensations, though I have perhaps failed to express them. Oh, yes!" said the Captain, sliding from his chair on to one knee, laying his hand on his heart, and speaking in musical and plaintive tones, "the most rapturous—the most devoted—the most unchangeable—the—the"—

"Spare your eloquence, sir," said Lady Lee. "Believe me, it will not avail. How long," she added, changing her tone from contempt to anger, as she saw him prepare to renew his protestations—"how long will your ingenious vanity continue to

mislead you? Ask yourself, sir, what share it has had in your mistake and your discomfiture; and forgive me if I convince you of my sincerity by leaving you." So saying, she swept from the room with a swift, impatient step.

For a moment Sloperton remained on his knee, gazing after her with a countenance which, though both sad and serious, did not present its usual combination of those elements of expression. There was a very genuine look of astonishment and mortification in his eyes and half-opened mouth—the latter showing a little dark aperture under the mustache. Was he dreaming? Was it, indeed, true that he, Cecil Sloperton, whose conquering motto was brief as Cæsar's had been, not merely rejected, which of itself seemed impossible enough, but rejected with scorn?

Very pale, and with a numb, tingling sensation, he gathered up his hat, gloves, and cane, and went out into the hall. A servant stepped forward to let him out: he dared not look at the man—what if the fellow had been listening, and heard Lady Lee's rejection of him! He almost fancied he detected derision in the man's face and attitude as he held open the door for him—nay, the very groom who held his bridle and stirrup seemed, to his jealous sensitiveness, to be struggling with some secret joke—at *his* expense, of course.

As he rode away, the scene began to re-enact itself in his mind. The Captain's feminine vanity, thus sharply wounded, shrieked out like Venus, when she felt the spear of Diomed. He cursed the whole household—he cursed himself—he cursed Bagot, who had got the money which he, Sloperton, had so sagaciously and thriftily invested in the purchase of his own great mortification. No doubt (he said to himself) Bagot knew what the result would be when he inveigled him into the bargain—no doubt he was at this moment laughing at him for a fool! And, truly, Bagot might, with great propriety, have applied to him the words of Falstaff, "Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pounds."

Such were the thoughts that accompanied him in his homeward ride to his lodgings. He lodged in the main street of Doddington, with an ancient widow, retired from business. The ancient widow had a niece, Miss Finkle, small, pale, and attenuated, and who, owing partly to these accidents of nature, partly to an acidity of temper, had, contrary to her own wish, remained unmarried, though some time past her youth. It would have been better for this damsel's comfort, both of body and mind, had the Captain never come to lodge there, for she not only fell, as a matter of course, hopelessly and distractedly in love with him, but, with a hope of

appearing to the best advantage in his eyes, wore such tight shoes and dresses that she could scarcely either walk or breathe, and was rapidly reducing herself to the condition of a consumptive cripple. She had been hitherto decidedly unpopular with her neighbours, whom she had frequently exasperated by her acerbities; but the sentiments of many of her young female acquaintances appeared to have undergone of late a magical change in her favour. They became assiduous in their visits, and, setting at nought the little defects which had formerly offended them in Miss Finkle's deportment, they were running in and out all day long, on the speculation of meeting the Captain on the stairs; and when that desired event took place, they would, according to their several dispositions, either pass him with an air of austere and virtuous unconsciousness, or turn their backs and run off giggling.

Some of these admiring nymphs had assembled in Miss Finkle's sitting-room to catch a glimpse of the returning Adonis.

"He's coming, Maria!" said Miss Tiddy, a short, plump girl, thrusting herself between Miss Brown and Miss Simpson, who monopolised the window.

"Well, you needn't push me, dear, if he is!" said Miss Simpson, snappishly—for her nose had been

unbecomingly flattened against the window by Miss Tiddy's onset.

"Isn't he lovely?" murmured Miss Nopetty, a slender damsel with languishing black eyes, whose father kept a circulating library. "He's the imidge of Lord Reginald de Courcy in the 'Perils of Passion.'"

Miss Finkle had kept away from the window that she might be ready to run down and open the door to the Captain.

"If I did admire him, I'd die before I'd show it so much," she said, with virtuous indignation, to Miss Nopetty, who had got on a chair to look out of the window over the heads of her friends. "Do get off the chair, Hemma—I wonder you ain't ashamed." This snub was ungracious, to say the least, for Miss Nopetty had lately been beaten by her father for bringing novels surreptitiously to Miss Finkle, gratis, out of pure friendship.

"For my part, I wonder what you all see in the man," said grim Miss Brown, who had been watching at the window longer than any of them, and who, like Chili vinegar, was sour though ardent.

Unconscious, for once, of the attention he excited, Sloperton dismounted and entered his lodgings. Neither the hospitable smile of the martyred Miss Finkle, as she opened the door, nor the openly-

admiring glances of Miss Tiddy and Miss Nopetty, nor the sidelong ones of Miss Simpson and Miss Brown, shed any gleam of comfort into the Captain's breast as he walked hastily up-stairs. Not one look or sign of notice did he vouchsafe in return before he slammed the door of his sitting-room. There was a pink and perfumed note on the table (exactly like one stuck conspicuously in the frame of the mirror over the mantelpiece), which the Captain snatched up, but, instead of reading it, wrenched it in twain, with an improper expression, and flung the fragments into the grate ; while his servant, coming into the room with a message, was dismissed with a vehement abruptness that testified to his extreme discomposure. It was long since he had been so ruffled, for his habitual successes had ill prepared him to sustain a repulse. If he could have found comfort anywhere, it would have been in that room, for on the walls were multiplied pictures of the object of his tenderest devotion — viz., himself. He was represented in chalks, and water-colours, and oils ; sitting, standing, reading, and riding ; in plain clothes and undress and full dress ; with his helmet beside him, and with it on his head. In the contemplation of these he always found solace, but now he didn't even look at them.

He sat revolving the direst projects of revenge.

He would marry the handsomest, most accomplished, and most fashionable girl he could find, and bring her down to Doddington to harrow up the soul of the then too-late-repentant Lady Lee. He would seek an opportunity to meet her, and wither her by his calm scorn. He would insult Bagot, who, after fleeing him, was doubtless now enjoying his discomfiture—even Kitty Fillett was included in these schemes of vengeance.

In this humour he was found by Mr Oates, who came rattling up-stairs like a tornado, followed by a bull-dog and two terriers. Mr Oates's own spirits were so high as to be altogether out of the reach of calamity, which rendered him by no means a desirable companion in the present low state of Sloper-ton's; and the Captain asked him, with some irritation, "Whether the fact of his having nerves of his own like fiddle-strings entitled him to torture other people's with his infernal clatter?"

"Beg pardon of your nerves, Nobby," said the irreverent Mr Oates, seating himself on the table, and dangling one leg to and fro. "Don't faint yet, there's a good fellow, as I've something to tell you. Shall I borrow a smelling-bottle from Ribs-and-ankles?" (This was Mr Oates's sobriquet for Miss Finkle, in allusion to the most prominent features of her anatomy.)

Sloperton put on a look of lofty contempt, but did not succeed in disconcerting the audacious Mr Oates in the least.

"Sloper, my boy," said that gentleman, "I wish you had waited for my advice before you paid forfeit in that Goshawk business. I stood to my bet, you know—'twas only fifty; besides, my maxim is, If you lose you lose, and there's an end on't."

"What!—don't you think I got well out of it?" said Sloperton.

"Pooh!" said Oates; "'twas a plant—a regular do. Just listen, now, how I discovered it. I had mentioned the matter to Chick, a sporting friend of mine, who is training a horse quietly down at ——. I mentioned you had a heavy bet against the mare, and asked him to find out all he could about her. Now it so happened, that not long ago he observed Seager and another man, who, from his description, must be old Lee, entering a stable very early in the morning. They had a mare brought out to try, and Chick saw her come back lame."

"Good God! you don't say so!" exclaimed Sloperton, who listened with suddenly-aroused interest.

"Lame, and no mistake," repeated Oates. "Well, upon hearing from me, and coupling what I had told him with what he had seen, he went to the stable quietly, to try and pump the groom in charge of the

mare ; but he was close, and wouldn't peach—said the mare was all right, and 'twas only her way of going. But, in a day or two afterwards, the groom comes to my friend Chick, and tells him that Seager had been fool enough to thrash him soundly for some neglect, and in revenge he would tell him, now, that the mare was dead lame, and that the 'vet,' whose name he mentioned, believed she'd got navicular. I always thought that Seager a bit of a leg. Ain't you sorry, now, Sloper, that you paid away your money so easily ?”

“No,” said Sloperton, grinding his teeth ; “I never was so glad of anything in my life. I'd have paid double the money, cheerfully, for the chance it gives me. You say he thinks the other man was Lee ?”

“So he says ; but that's easily found out from the groom. Besides, you can ascertain whether Lee was, or was not, at the Heronry about that time.”

“Exactly,” said Sloperton. “We must follow this up. Only let us bring it home to 'em, Oates, my boy, and I shall think the money well bestowed. I'll push the thing to the utmost.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

SLOPERTON lost no time in pursuing the trace thus afforded him. He questioned the groom himself, who confirmed his previous statement as to the lameness of the mare and the nature of it, and afforded conclusive evidence that the stranger who had accompanied his master was Colonel Bagot Lee. He tried also to sound the veterinary surgeon, but that gentleman was never to be found when wanted in the business, and there was, therefore, reason to suppose he was in the interests of the opposite party. However, the materials collected being laid before an eminent man of law, were at once pronounced by him sufficient to support proceedings for fraud against Seager and the Colonel ; and Sloperton, still smarting from his recent repulse and losses, lost no time in commencing a prosecution.

The first notice of this was a terrible shock to Bagot. He cowered beneath it, hid himself at the

Heronry, and would see no one except his confederate Seager.

But in a little while he began to hold up his head again. By a curious mental process, common in such cases, he began himself to receive the colouring which he had wished to give to the transaction as the true one. He actually persuaded himself that he had been from the first ignorant and unsuspecting of the mare's true state ; that, in recommending Sloperton to pay forfeit, he had given him conscientious advice, quite independent of any hint to that effect from Seager ; and that he, Bagot, had been merely an innocent tool in the whole business, and was now an extremely ill-used man. So completely did he surrender himself to this delusion, that he even reasoned on the like imaginary grounds in his conversations with Seager ; and that gentleman, far from contradicting, rather encouraged the hallucination, which he privately chuckled over as one of the best jokes he had ever heard, and only regretted that the delicate nature of the subject prevented him from sharing his amusement with some appreciating friend.

"You know," poor Bagot would say, over his grog—"you know the mare went splendidly that morning—a most astonishing mare. Very well, I was Sloperton's friend, you see—as good a friend as ever he had ; by Jupiter, sir, he knew nothing at all about

billiards till I showed him. I was the man that showed him how to cut in the red off the spot, and how to bring both balls back into baulk, and half-a-dozen other good strokes. Well, sir, what was more natural than for me to give him a bit of friendly advice?—though, to be sure, it was against your interests—but that couldn't be helped, you know, Seager."

Seager would look at him fixedly, with a comical expression in his hard, unwinking eye, but with perfect gravity.

"Therefore," Bagot would go on, with an argumentative motion of his head—"therefore, though 'twas, as I say, contrary to your interests, and though you, Seager, were also a friend of mine that I had a great regard for, yet, as a man of honour—as a man of honour and uprightness, who likes to see everything upon the square—I was in duty bound to give him the advice which I did. 'I've seen the mare,' I said to him; 'I know what she can do. You're a young man; I've had great experience—pay the forfeit.' And now, damme, sir, he turns round upon me in the most ungrateful and ungentlemanly way, and says I got him into the trap—says, by gad, sir, 'twas my fault." And the poor Colonel, with a profound conviction of the ingratitude of mankind in general, and of Sloperton in particular, would shake his head, and bury his red nose in his tumbler.

"What a shocking thing 'twould be," Mr Seager would remark, with grave irony, "if Sloperton should persuade the jury to believe him. Quite horrible, you know—and the law is infernally uncertain. Lots of innocent people get shopped, you know."

"Jury, sir!" Bagot would roar; "there's nothing to go to a jury. 'Twill never come into court, sir!"

If it never had come into court, that would have been owing less to the excellence of Bagot's case than to the exertions of Seager. That gentleman was now in his element—bullying and bribing witnesses, suppressing evidence, here and there inventing a little, and throwing out hints for the guidance of his legal advisers which impressed those gentlemen with a great idea of his astuteness. Plots and counter-plots, concealed efforts at compromise, incessant attempts to discover the enemy's weak points and to conceal his own, and frequent consultations with low attorneys accustomed to dirty work, enlivened his existence, and called all his faculties into play; and, as the racing season was luckily drawing to a close, he was able to lend his undivided energies to the business.

Meanwhile they were out on bail till the trial should come on. To find security for this bail, and to meet the more pressing demands of the tradesmen in town, who, by arresting him, might just now have

placed him in an extremely awkward predicament, had nearly exhausted all Bagot's hard-earned thousand pounds. He at first joined Seager in his efforts, especially in the matter of the compromise, to effect which he would have given Sloperton notes of hand to any amount ; but Sloperton's nature was vindictive, and had these offers been as substantial as they were munificent, he would have rejected them. The Captain, with a firmness that showed how deeply his vanity had been wounded, steadily insisted on his pound of flesh ; and Bagot, taking Seager's advice to leave the management of the business to him, went back to the Heronry and drank harder than ever.

He was not, however, allowed to remain here undisturbed. Applications for money from Seager, for the purpose of carrying on the war, were frequent and pressing. Besides this, many of the tradesmen to whom he was indebted, aware of the proceedings pending against him, became loud in their demands for payment, accompanying them with threats in case of non-compliance ; and Bagot, foreseeing that an arrest for debt would not only prevent him from doing all in his power to prevent the trial from taking place, but would also prevent his evading the penalty of the law in case of judgment being given against him, was driven to satisfy them with something more substantial than

fair words, and to pay the more menacing in full. Mr Dubbley, too, was urgent for payment—or rather Mr Dubbley's lawyer, for the recovery of the debt was now in legal hands; and though Bagot did not fear that the Squire would really proceed to extremities against him, yet his conduct served greatly to add to the embarrassments of the unfortunate Colonel.

Seager had not failed to hint to the Colonel the expediency of using his position as guardian to Julius to obtain a present supply. Bagot would not have hesitated to do this—sheltering his conscience, as usual, under the plea of its being merely a loan, to be repaid hereafter—but it was not in his power. His guardianship of the young baronet was personal, merely—the property being managed by trustees, who, as Bagot had already ascertained by experiment, would not permit any infringement of the interests of their young charge, however plausibly it might be veiled, nor indeed any interference on his part. Apprised of the uselessness of any attempt of this kind, Seager became louder and more direct in his insinuations as to the wrong Bagot had suffered by the interposition of the present heir between him and affluence. “Once rid of that little beggar,” Seager ventured to say, “we should go through this infernal business with flying

colours." Bagot made no answer at the time ; but Seager noticed that, instead of petting the boy as formerly, he now once or twice repulsed him with moroseness.

"By the Lord, Lee," Seager said one day, "if I had a young nephew of that sort sticking in my throat, I'm half inclined to think he wouldn't stick there long. I'd put him on a vicious pony, or set him to play with a dog that I thought was going mad, or try some dodge that gave him a chance of going to kingdom come without compromising myself. If he would only pretend to be dead for a couple of months or so, 'twould answer our purpose. In the mean time the trial comes on in six weeks, and no funds forthcoming."

Another time Seager, observing the Colonel to be more dismal than usual, told him, to comfort him, that they needn't want for money to carry on the business.

"How so?" inquired Bagot, with interest. "Where is it to come from?"

"I didn't say anything about it before," said Seager, "for, knowing your sentiments for her ladyship, I thought 'twas best to ascertain myself how she was disposed to take the thing before mentioning it to you ; so, yesterday, I went and spoke to her quietly. I set before her a strong picture of perse-

cuted innocence" (here Seager winked facetiously), "hinted darkly at the mischief that threatened you, spoke of the necessity of avoiding family disgrace, and finally told her that nothing but a supply of the ready was wanting to avert it."

"The devil you did!" exclaimed Bagot. "And pray, sir, who authorised you to make any application of the kind? Cursed officious!" muttered the Colonel, his lips trembling with excitement.

"To be sure," said Mr Seager, ironically, "cursed officious!—oh, yes! 'Twas such a pleasure to me to undertake the office!—talking to women of that sort is so much in my line! And her way of treating me was so pleasant—not cool nor contemptuous, oh no! Didn't look at me as if I was a toad! not in the least!"

"Well, sir," said the Colonel, presently, "and what did she say? Let out some spite, ah? Cool indifference, with a touch of venom for me? By the Lord, I can fancy her—I can fancy her, with her infernal lofty calmness. Pretended pity, I suppose, but said I was quite competent to manage my own affairs—wouldn't presume to interfere in them—or something of that sort. Oh, I know her well."

"Quite wrong," said Mr Seager; "she said at once that she was ready to assist you to the utmost of her power. You say she's clever, Lee, but she

seems to me awfully soft. She sat down directly (luckily, without inquiring into the particulars of the case), and took pen and ink to write you a message to that effect ; but she seemed to find some difficulty in addressing you, for she said, after tearing up two or three sheets, that as I seemed to be in Colonel Lee's confidence, I would perhaps be good enough to deliver the message verbally, which, perhaps, he would prefer to a communication from herself."

"All sheer humbug, sir," said Bagot ; "she knows I've got power over her, and she wants to propitiate me—a sprat to catch a herring, sir. She knows deuced well I'd rather rot than take a sous from her."

"Why, of course, she must have a motive of some kind ; she isn't such a fool, you may be sure, as to offer all this without expecting to get something by it. But you needn't disturb yourself about her motives—all you want is her money."

"One word !" said Bagot, angrily. "I'll have none of her money—not if she offered it on her knees. And I beg you'll not interfere any more in that quarter, as you will only oblige me to tell her what I now tell you"—

"Well," said Seager, "please yourself. Without a supply of the needful 'twill go hard with us, and I shall make preparations for a bolt ; I advise you to do the same."

Seager could not comprehend Bagot's scruples, which would not allow him to accept an obligation from a person he disliked—more than disliked, indeed, for his feelings towards Lady Lee had now risen to positive hatred. He had at once divined aright the cause of Sloperton's sudden acrimonious hostility; and the account which his inquiries elicited from the watchful Fillett, of the circumstances of the Captain's last visit, her ladyship's abrupt retirement to her own room, and Sloperton's retreat with every appearance of discomfiture, quite satisfied him of the correctness of his surmise. Accordingly, his hostility towards Lady Lee was immensely aggravated when he considered her, in addition to former offences, as the cause of his present anxiety.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONE dreary autumn afternoon Bagot sat in his room perusing a letter from Seager, who had gone to town to look after the business of the trial. The Colonel abhorred the subject so much that he could scarcely bring himself to read the details which Seager had furnished him with—but at length he applied himself doggedly to the task. The letter fluttered in his hand, the unsteadiness of which had increased so much that he did not trust himself to shave more than a very small patch of chin, and had let his large grizzled whiskers effect a junction across his upper lip through the medium of a bristly mustache, exhibiting altogether such a quantity of hair that one might have fancied he had thrust his nose and eyes through a hole in an old wig.

Though Bagot did succeed, after a fashion, in excluding a belief in his own complicity and consequent liability to disgrace, yet it hovered round him

always in an indefinite form, colouring his meditations with the most sombre hues, and showing his future through a darkening medium. He had now made some steps, even in years, down the declivity of life, and his fast style of existence had of course accelerated his progress. Old intimacies were disappearing, swallowed up by matrimony or business, or the grave; a young set were rising round him, who regarded him doubtfully, withholding both the confidence they gave to those of their own age, and the respect that should have attached to one of his. Their society was more necessary to him than his to them, and therefore, though he resented, at first, such undue liberties as the more reckless were inclined to take with him, and had put several forward young gentlemen down with great majesty, yet, finding that he must either put up with their irreverent jokes or else painfully narrow his circle, he was fain to allow himself to be regarded in a comic light. The loss of this kind of dilapidated popularity would seem trifling—but it had almost become Bagot's all. What substitute for it had he to look to? Where was the promise that those comforts which Macbeth had learnt ought to accompany old age would be his? He must continue to be "old Lee"—"that precious old sinner the Colonel"—or nothing.

Mr Seager's epistle being one that might be re-

quired for future reference, Bagot opened a drawer filled with old letters, in order to put it by after reading it. With a view of diverting his mind from its gloom for a moment, he occupied himself in turning over some of these. Presently he took the drawer out, and placing it on the table between himself and the brandy bottle, sat searching among the heaps of letters, sometimes pausing to turn one right side up before flinging it aside. He had not thought he had so many of them by him ; the writers of some were almost forgotten in person and name. It is not a cheerful task, under any circumstances, this of looking over old letters—there is a sadness in glancing at bits of the past through these loopholes ;—and a troubadour of our own time, the venerable Milnes, reading in extreme old age the epistolary effusions of his youth, was moved even to verse.

Bagot, though not poetic, was moved to feelings more akin to poetry than he would easily have believed. The gaiety of these memories of his hot youth made the present more dismal by contrast. There were invitations to parties which Bagot remembered to have found particularly jovial. There was a letter from his mother, written to him at school, when there was somebody in the world to care about him. Then he lighted on a whole packet of letters with the superscription of the top one in a

female hand, and these he opened, one by one. It was difficult, even for Bagot himself, to recognise the hero of those endearing phrases, that affectionate solicitude, that eager interest, poured forth with the warmth of an imaginative girl who had been resolved to turn defects into charms, and to exaggerate the latter where they existed, in the red-nosed, grizzled reader who now frowned at them over his eye-glasses. He remembered that this love affair had been a pleasant pastime, and that these affectionate epistles, ascribing to him qualities on whose absence he valued himself, had a good deal diverted him at the time. Somehow the expressions of interest and affection did not now strike him in a jocular light.

He dropt the last of them from his hand, and sat gazing at the wall with eyes more watery than usual. Half-formed visions of future respectability flitted across his mind—he was scarce fifty yet—older fellows than he married and settled down quietly every day. Only this cursed prosecution still hung between him and the horizon. Let that be well over, and he would seriously think about changing his life. But to get it well over he must have money, and how that was to be procured he did not know; and to avoid returning into the old weary hopeless track, he took up another letter. It was from Sir Joseph, written before his marriage, at a

time when he was seriously ill ; and it recommended to Bagot's care and consideration, as heir to the property, some improvements the Baronet wished carried out. Sir Joseph had recovered from the attack, and the circumstance had made but slight impression on Bagot ; but now he could not help thinking what a different position he would have been in had his nephew died then. As he was dead now, it would have been all the same to him, and what a difference to Bagot ! There would have been no Lady Lee, no Julius, no impending disgrace.

Presently Bagot put away his letters, took his hat, and set out to walk over to Monkstone. In two or three previous interviews, his creditor, Mr Dubbley, who could not quite divest himself of his respect for Bagot, had professed great regret at the proceedings against him, promised to stop them, and renewed his assurances of friendship ; but no sooner had Bagot turned his back than all his promises were forgotten. On this occasion, however, the Squire was either really absent, or, as Bagot suspected, had denied himself. The Colonel was returning homeward in desponding mood, when, passing by the Dubbley Arms in Lanscote, he stepped in to refresh himself with a glass of brandy at the bar.

This drinking of drams at the Dubbley Arms, when Bagot happened to be passing of an after-

noon, had never been a very rare occurrence. Bagot was not proud—he liked to keep up his popularity by talking with the people who lived in the neighbourhood of the Heronry, many of whom had known him from a boy, and he would chat with the landlord or his guests for half an hour together with great condescension. Of late, Bagot's craving both for drams and for society had increased. He had never been fond of being alone, but at present his own thoughts became speedily intolerable to him ; and, not caring under present circumstances to venture among his usual associates, he became doubly affable to his inferiors.

Accordingly, on the evening in question, Bagot entered as aforesaid for a dram. It must not be imagined that Bagot ever did this in a way to suffer loss of personal dignity ; on the contrary, it increased his popularity without diminishing the respect in which he was held. The landlord was a sporting character, and Bagot had therefore plenty of inquiries to make from him—in the midst of which he would introduce the subject of the dram quite incidentally. As there happened, this evening, to be two or three farmers drinking in the bar, Bagot, after bidding good evening to these, who stood up and touched their hats at his entrance,

said to the landlord, "Oblige me with a glass of sherry, James." For Bagot did not choose to be heard asking for brandy; but the landlord, understanding him perfectly, handed him a glass of cognac.

"Really," said Bagot, wiping his mouth with his handkerchief after drinking it—"really, I was beginning to feel quite exhausted; I don't know how I should have got home without that."

The Colonel having finished his brandy, and impressed the landlord and the farmers with an almost oppressive sense of his affability, was leaving the inn, when he encountered at the door an ancient man dressed in a narrow-brimmed hat, a skin waistcoat, and black breeches and stockings. This singular figure drew itself up and saluted the Colonel with a very elaborate, ceremonious bow.

Bagot stared at him for a minute. "What! the conjuror, eh?" he said. "Come to conjure a little money out of the villagers' pockets, my friend?"

"My errand, sir," returned Mr Holmes, "is of a less cheerful nature. I am come in search of the sexton."

"What d'ye want of the sexton?" asked Bagot. "Anybody dead?"

"My little grandson departed this life just now in the caravan on our road to this place," returned Mr Holmes. "Perhaps you do him the honour to

remember him, sir—a child about the size of the young gentleman you have at home. Ah, sir, you may recollect I always said he was not strong enough for the profession.”

Bagot stood gazing at the old man in deep thought. “I’ll show you where the sexton lives,” he said; “I’m going that way. Walk on and I’ll follow you.”

Bagot turned hastily into the inn, swallowed another glass of brandy, and followed Mr Holmes, who was walking slowly up the road.

The Colonel walked for some time in silence beside the old man. At length turning abruptly to him, “Are you rich?” he asked.

“Rich!” echoed Mr Holmes; “your worship is pleased to be facetious.”

“Give a plain answer,” growled the Colonel.

“Do you think,” returned the conjuror, pointing to his dress, and to the caravan, which might now be descried in the gloom as he indicated its position—“do you think I would live like this if I were rich, sir? No, sir; if I were rich, I would indulge my taste for the legitimate drama—I would be a theatrical manager, sir. I have been smothered all my life by poverty.”

“If a way were shown you to better your circumstances, with little trouble, would you undertake

the small risk that might attend it?" asked the Colonel.

"If your worship would condescend to be a little plainer, I could give a plainer answer," returned Mr Holmes. "At any rate," stopping short and laying his hand on his skin waistcoat—"at any rate, I could be secret."

"Have you told any one of the death of this grandchild of yours?" resumed the Colonel presently.

"No one!" answered the other. "It only took place half an hour ago."

"And where is the body?" asked Bagot.

"If you'll do me the honour to turn aside from the road here, I'll show you," answered the conjuror.

Bagot assented. The part of the road they had reached widened into a small green with some geese feeding on it. At the side of this green the caravan in which Mr Holmes and his family resided and travelled was drawn up, the horse that drew the vehicle being turned loose to graze. A flight of wooden steps led up to the door, and Mr Holmes ascending, held it open, and invited the Colonel to follow.

A lamp swung by brass chains from the roof of the interior, and by its light Bagot saw the child's

mother seated by a little bed. Glancing thereon, the Colonel involuntarily removed his hat out of respect, partly for the mourner, partly for the poor little remnant of mortality she bent over. On the outside of the coverlet lay the dead child, who appeared to have spent his last hours in the exercise of his vocation, for the body was dressed in the little tight drawers and hose, and the spangled doublet, in which he had been accustomed to appear on the stage. The strange dress, and the small, thin, sunken face, produced together an effect as quaint as mournful.

Bagot spoke a few words in a low tone to the conjuror, and he, addressing the woman, who did not look up at their entrance, told her he had business with the gentleman, and wished to speak with him alone. She rose, and, mechanically folding her shawl about her, left the caravan without any change in the tearless, settled melancholy of her aspect.

"There isn't a better place to talk of business in the whole world than a caravan," said Mr Holmes. "There are no walls, and consequently no ears—and I'd defy a bird of the air to carry the matter."

So saying, Mr Holmes closed and bolted the door; while the woman, descending to the lowest step of

the ladder, seated herself there, and buried her face in her shawl.

So she remained for near an hour. Twice, during that time, the door above opened, and the conjuror put his wizened face out, but, appearing satisfied that nobody was within hearing, immediately withdrew it.

At length the door opened for the last time, and Bagot prepared to descend.

"Leave that cursed lamp," he said, turning on the threshold, with an oath, and re-entering, as he observed that Mr Holmes, having detached the cresset from the ceiling, was preparing obsequiously to light him down the steps.

"True—most true," said the old gentleman, blowing it out at three feeble puffs; after which, with his finger on his lips, he came on tiptoe to the door, and stretched his neck, with theatrical caution, in every direction. "You may come forth, sir," he said in a whisper. "Not a mouse stirring."

"So much the better," said Bagot, in whose eyes there was a wild look of excitement. "Now, don't fail in your part of the business. Mind, good treatment, and immediate compliance with my future directions whenever you receive them, are what I bargain for—let these conditions be fulfilled to my satisfaction, and your reward shall be proportionate."



Bayet quitting W. Holmes's Caravan Chap. XXV



Mr Holmes, with elaborate and graphic pantomime, patted his waistcoat several times, bowing deeply, and the Colonel descended. After Bagot's figure had vanished in the gloom, the conjuror called the woman, who reascended to the caravan, the door of which was then closed for the night.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BETWEEN the village of Lanscote and the Heronry a side-road branched off, leading also to Dodding-ton. At their junction the two roads bounded an abrupt rocky chasm, containing a black gloomy pool of unknown depth; known to the neighbourhood as the Mine Pool. A speculator had dug it many years before, in expectation of being richly rewarded by the mineral treasures supposed to exist there, and had continued the enterprise till the miners reached a great depth, when the water rose too rapidly to be kept under, and the work was abandoned. A few low bushes fringed the edge of it, besides which a dilapidated railing fenced it from the road. It formed a grim feature as it appeared unexpectedly yawning beside the green and flowery lane, and suggested ideas altogether incongruous with the smiling, peaceful character of the surrounding landscape.

On the morning after Bagot's interview with Mr Holmes, as related in the last chapter, Fillett and Julius were coming down the lane towards Lanscote. They were often sent out for a morning walk, and had been easily induced to choose this road by the Colonel, who had promised Julius a ride on the front of his saddle if he would come towards the village.

In these walks Julius was accustomed to impart, for the benefit of Kitty, most of the information collected from his various instructors. He would tell her of distant countries which his mamma had described to him—of pictures of foreign people and animals drawn for him by Orelia—of fairy tales told him by Rosa—of scraps of botanical rudiments communicated to him by the Curate. And being a sharp-witted little fellow, with a wonderful memory, he seldom failed to command Kitty's admiration and applause. There were few branches of natural or metaphysical science which he had not treated of in this way. He had explained to her all about thunderbolts—he had destroyed for ever her faith in will-o'-the-wisps, leaving instead a mere matter-of-fact, uninteresting *ignis fatuus*—he had sounded her belief in witchcraft—he had put questions respecting the nature and habits of ghosts which she was wholly unable to solve: "Bless

the child," Kitty would say, "it's as good as a play to hear him."

Julius, hovering round Kitty, and chatting with her, frequently looked anxiously about to see if his Uncle Bag were coming, that he might claim the promised ride. When they arrived near the Mine Pool, down into the depths of which he was fond of gazing with a child's awe, the Colonel suddenly met them coming on horseback up the road. Julius, clamorous to be lifted up, ran towards him; but Bagot called out that he was riding home for something he had forgotten, and would speedily overtake him. He passed them, and trotted on to where the road made a bend. There he suddenly pulled up, and called to Kitty to leave the boy for a minute and come up—that he wanted to speak to her.

Fillett obeyed, tripped up to the horse's side, and walked beside the Colonel, who proceeded onward at a slow pace, talking of the old affair of Dubbley and her ladyship, and pretending to have some fresh matter of the kind in his head. Kitty noticed that his manner was odd and nervous, and his language incoherent, and before she could at all clearly perceive what it was he wanted to tell her, he released her and trotted onward to the Heronry, while she hastened to rejoin her young charge.

Julius was not in the spot where she had left him, and Fillett ran breathlessly down the road, calling him by name. Reaching a point where she could see a long way down the path, and finding he was not in sight, she retraced her steps, alternately calling him aloud and muttering to herself what a plaguey child he was. She looked behind every bush as she came along, and on again reaching the Mine Pool looked anxiously over the fence. Some object hung in the bushes a few yards from where she stood, just below a broken part of the fence; she hastened to the spot and looked down—it was Juley's hat.

Clasping her hands together with a loud shriek, poor Kitty's eyes wandered round in every direction in search of some gleam of comfort;—in search of some one to help her, under the burden of this terrible discovery. No one was in sight; only she saw a yellow caravan going up the other road to Doddington, at a quarter of a mile off. She would have run after it shrieking to the driver to stop; but her limbs and voice alike failed her, and poor Kitty sunk down moaning on the ground. "What shall I say to my lady?" gasped Fillett.

Lady Lee was sitting in the library dressed for a walk, and waiting for her two friends who were

getting ready to accompany her, when she heard a great commotion in the servants' hall and rung the bell to ask the reason. It was slowly answered by a footman, who entered with a perturbed aspect, and said the noise was caused by Fillett, who was in hysterics. Lady Lee asked what had caused her disorder, but the man looked confused, and stammered in his reply. Before she could make any further inquiries, Fillett herself rushed frantically into the room, and threw herself down before Lady Lee. "O, my lady, my lady!" sobbed Fillett.

"What ails the girl?" asked Lady Lee, looking down at her with an astonished air.

Fillett tried to answer, but nothing was distinguishable except that "indeed it wasn't her fault." At this moment a whispering at the door caused Lady Lee to look up, and she saw that the servants were gathered there, peering fearfully in. Rising up, she grasped Kitty's shoulder, and shook her, faltering out, "Speak, girl!"

Fillett seized her mistress's dress, and again tried to tell her tale. In the midst of her sobs and exclamations, the words "Master Juley," and "the Mine Pool," alone were heard; but thus coupled they were enough.

Kitty, not daring to look up, fancied she felt her

ladyship pulling away her dress from her grasp, and clutched it more firmly. At the same moment there was a rush of servants from the door—the dress that Fillett held gave way with a loud rending—and Lady Lee fell senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

UNTIL they lost him, they did not fully know the importance of Julius in the household. He was a very limb lopt off. To miss his tiny step at the door, his chubby face at their knees, his ringing voice about the rooms and corridors, made all appear very desolate at the Heronry. Though there had been no funeral, no room made dismal for ever by the presence of his coffin, and though there was no little green grave in the churchyard, yet the house seemed a tomb haunted by the dim shadow of his form, and saddened by the echoes of his voice.

Every endeavour was made to recover the poor child's body. The Mine Pool was searched and dragged—it was even proposed to pump it dry ; but the numerous crannies and recesses that lurked in its gloomy depths precluded much prospect of success, though the attempts were still persisted in after all hope was relinquished.

Lady Lee's grief was of that silent sort which does not encourage attempts to console the mourner. She did not talk about her boy ; she was not often observed to weep—but, whenever any stray relic brought the poor child strongly before her mind's eye, she might be seen gazing at it with woeful earnestness, while her imagination “stuffed out his vacant garments with his form.” Rosa, observing this, stealthily removed, one by one, all the objects most likely to recall his image, and conveyed them to her own chamber ; and she and Orelia avoided, so far as might be, while in Lady Lee's presence, all allusions to their little lost friend. But in their own room at night they would talk about him for hours, cry themselves to sleep, and recover him in their dreams. A large closet in their apartment was sacred to his memory ; his clothes, his rocking-horse, his trumpet, his musket, his box of dominoes, and a variety of other peaceful and warlike implements were stored there, and served vividly to recall the image of their late owner.

Rosa, waking in the morning with her face all swollen with crying, would indulge her grief with occasional peeps into the cupboard at these melancholy relics ; while Orelia, a more austere mourner, sat silent under the hands of Fillett, whose sadness was of an infectious and obtrusive nature. Kitty

would sniff, sigh, compress her under-lip with her teeth, and glance sideways through her red, watery eyes at the sympathetic Rosa.

"I dreamt of dear Juley again last night, Orelia," Rosa would say.

"Oh, Miss Rosa, so did I," Fillett would break in, eager to give audible vent to her sorrow, "and so did Martha. Martha says she saw him like an angel; but I dreamed that I saw him galloping away upon Colonel Lee's horse, and that I called and called; 'Master Juley!' says I, the same as if it had been real, 'come to Kitty!' but he never looked back. And the butler dreamed the night before last he was drawing a bottle of port, and just as he was going to stick in the corkscrew, he saw the cork was in the likeness of Master Juley, and he woke up all of a cold shiver."

Conversations on this subject did not tend to cheer the young ladies' countenances before they met Lady Lee at the breakfast-table. On their way down stairs they would form the sternest resolutions (generally originating with Orelia, and assented to by Rosa) as to their self-command, and exertions to be cheerful in the presence of their still more afflicted friend. They would walk up and kiss her pale, mournful face, feeling their stoicism sorely tried the while, and sitting down to table would try to get up a little conversation; till Rosa would suddenly sob and

choke in her breakfast cup, and there was an end of the attempt.

This melancholy state of things was not confined to the drawing-room. A dismal hush pervaded the household, and the servants went about their avocations with slow steps and whispered voices. They took a strange pleasure, too, in assembling together at night, and remembering warnings and omens which were supposed to have foreshadowed the mournful fate of the poor little baronet. Exactly a week before the event, the cook had been woke while dozing before the kitchen fire after supper, by a voice calling her name three times, and when she looked round there was nobody there. The very day month before his loss, the housekeeper distinctly remembered to have dreamt of her grandmother, then deceased about half a century, who had appeared to her in a lavender gown trimmed with crape, and black mittens, and she had said the next morning that she was sure something would happen; in support of which prophecy she appealed to Mr Short the butler, who confirmed the same, and added, on his own account, that an evening or two afterwards he had heard a strange noise in the cellar, which might have been rats, but he didn't think it was.

The sight of Fillett, so intimately connected with the memory and the fate of her lost child, was naturally painful to Lady Lee, and Kitty, perceiving this to be the case, wisely kept out of her way, devoting herself entirely to the young ladies. Self-reproach greatly increased the sharpness of Kitty's sorrow for poor Julius; she accused herself of having, by her negligence, contributed to the unhappy catastrophe. She fancied, too, that she could read similar reproach in the behaviour of her fellow-servants towards her; with the exception, however, of Noble, who, melted at the sight of her melancholy, and forgetting all his previous causes of jealous resentment, was assiduous in his efforts to console her.

"Come," said Harry, meeting her near the stables one evening—"come, cheer up. Why, you ain't like the same girl. Anybody would think you had killed the poor boy."

"I feel as if I had, Noble," said Kitty, with pious austerity.

"But you shouldn't think so much about it, you know," replied her comforter. "It can't be helped now. You're crying of your eyes out, and they ain't a quarter so bright as what they was."

"Ho, don't talk to me of heyes," said Kitty, at the same time flashing at him a glance from the corners of the organs in question. "This is no time

for such vanities. We ought to think of our souls, Noble."

Noble appeared to be thinking just then less of souls than of bodies, for in his anxiety to comfort her he had passed his arm round her waist.

"Noble, I wonder at you!" exclaimed Kitty, drawing away from him with a reproving glance. "After the warning we've all had, such conduct is enough to call down a judgment upon us. I'm all of a tremble at the thoughts of what will become of you, if you don't repent."

Perhaps Harry may be excused for not seeing any immediate connection between the decease of his young master and the necessity of himself becoming an ascetic. But Kitty, in the excess of her penitence, from being as lively and coquettish a waiting-maid as could be found anywhere off the stage, suddenly became a kind of Puritan. It happened that at this time the members of a religious sect, very numerous in Doddington, having been suddenly seized with an access of religious zeal, held almost nightly what they termed "revivals"—meetings where inspired brethren poured forth their souls in extempore prayer; and those who were not fortunate enough to obtain possession of the platform, indemnified themselves by torrents of pious ejaculations, which well-nigh drowned the voice of the principal

orator. There is something attractive to the plebeian imagination in the idea of taking heaven by storm : the clamour, excitement, and *éclat* attending a public conversion had caused the ranks of these uproarious devotees to be recruited by many of their hearers, for the most part susceptible females ; and Kitty, going to attend these meetings under the escort of Mr Noble (who, with profound hypocrisy, affected a leaning towards Methodism as soon as he perceived Miss Fillett's bias in that direction), was converted the very first night. The grocer whose lodgings Oates and Bruce occupied was the preacher on this occasion, and his eloquence was so fervid and effective that, coupled with the heat of the place, it threw Kitty into hysterics. At the sight of so fair a penitent in this condition, many brethren of great sanctity hastened to her assistance, and questioned her so earnestly and affectionately as to her spiritual feelings, some of them even embracing her in the excess of their joy at seeing this good-looking brand snatched from the burning, that Mr Noble, conceiving (erroneously, no doubt) that they were somewhat trenching on his prerogative, interfered, and conveyed her from the scene. After this, Kitty became a regular attendant at the revivals, and her demeanour grew more serious than ever, insomuch that Mr Dubbley, ignorant of this change in her sentiments, and peti-

tioning for a meeting at the white gate, received an unexpected and dispiriting repulse.

The personage who seemed the least affected by grief of the household was the cat Pick. Perhaps he missed the teazings and tuggings, and frequent invasions of his majestic ease, which he had been wont to sustain ; if so, this was probably to him a source of private self-congratulation and rejoicing. Never was a cat so petted as he now was, for the sake of his departed master, with whom he had been such a favourite. But Pick, far from testifying any regret, eat, lapped, purred, basked, and washed his face with his paw, as philosophically as ever.

The Curate's sorrow at the event did him good—it distracted his mind from his own sorrows, and gave a new direction to his feelings for Hester. The unselfishness of his nature had an opportunity of displaying itself on the occasion. The thought of Lady Lee's grief had roused his warmest sympathies, and he longed to comfort her—he longed to sit by her side, to hold her hand, to pour forth words of consolation and hope. He had done this, but not to the extent he could have wished ; he could not trust himself for that. The Curate felt the most deep and tender pity for her—and we all know what pity is akin to: those very near relations, the Siamese twins, were not more closely allied than the Curate's com-

passion and love for Lady Lee. Therefore Josiah, in his moments of extremest sympathy, kept watch and ward upon his heart, and said not all he felt.

But he bethought himself of preaching a sermon on the subject. He was conscious that his sermons had of late lacked earnestness and spirit; and he would now pour his feelings into a discourse at once touching and consolatory. He chose for his text, "*He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.*" He had intended to extract from this text a hopeful moral, and to set forth powerfully the reasons for being resigned and trustful under such trials. But the poor Curate felt too deeply himself on the occasion to be the minister of comfort to others, and, breaking down half-a-dozen times from emotion, set all Lanscote weeping.

"How could you make us all cry so, Josiah?" asked Rosa, reproachfully. "Weren't we sad enough before?"

In fact, it seemed as if poor Julius might have lived long, and died at a green old age, without being either more faithfully remembered or more sincerely lamented.

Finding themselves disappointed in all their efforts to comfort Lady Lee, Orelia and Rosa came to the conclusion that, so long as she remained at the Heronry, she would never cease to be saddened by

the image of the lost Juley. So they agreed it would be well to persuade her to leave the now sorrowful scene ; and no place seemed so likely to divert her sorrow, by making a powerful appeal to her feelings, as Orelia's cottage. Here she might recall her maiden fancies, and renew her youth, while her married life might slip aside like a sad episode in her existence.

"We'll all start together next week," said Orelia, when she had obtained Lady Lee's sanction to this arrangement.

"No," said Rosa, "not all, Reley. You and Hester shall go."

"What does the monkey mean?" cried Orelia. "You don't suppose we're going without you, do you?"

"You know I should like to accompany you, Reley," said Rosa, "and you know I shall be dreadfully disconsolate without you ; but I must go and live with Josiah."

"Live with Josiah, indeed !" quoth Orelia, with high scorn. "What does Josiah want of you, d'ye think, to plague his life out? Hasn't he got that Mrs what's-her-name, his housekeeper, to take care of him and his property? I'm sure I never see the woman without thinking of candle-ends."

"Tisn't to take care of him that I stay, but to

comfort him," said Rosa. "You've no idea how low-spirited Josiah has been this some time past, ever since his friend Captain Fane went away. He has lost his interest in his books and flowers, and sits for hours in thought looking so melancholy. Oh! I couldn't think of leaving him."

Rosa persisted in this determination, and all the concession they could obtain was, that as soon as Josiah recovered his spirits she would rejoin her friends at Orelia's cottage. Meantime, the latter and Lady Lee made preparations for a speedy departure.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE Squire's preceptor, Mr Randy, saw with concern that he could never hope to obtain undivided empire over his pupil. He had, it is true, considerable influence with him — knew and humoured his foibles—assisted him with advice on difficult points, and had, in fact, become in various ways almost necessary to him. Nevertheless, he felt that Mr Dubbley's susceptibility to female fascinations perpetually endangered his position. He had, indeed, attained the post of grand vizier, but might at any moment be stripped of his dignities at the first suggestion of a hostile sultana.

After long consideration of the subject, Mr Randy came to the conclusion that the most effectual way to establish himself firmly at Monkstone would be, to take care that this other great power, whose possible advent he constantly dreaded, instead of being a rival, should be entirely in his interests.

This seemed to him, theoretically, a master-stroke of policy : to carry it into practice might not be easy. As he was revolving the matter in his mind one evening, after passing through Lanscote on his way home from Monkstone to Doddington, he perceived the Curate's housekeeper taking a little fresh air at the garden gate. She had heated herself with the operation of making her own tea, and leaving the tea-pot on the hob, to "draw" as she termed it, had come out to cool herself before drinking it.

At the sight of her, Mr Randy's air became brisker. He walked more jauntily—he swung and twirled his stick, instead of leaning on it—he placed his hat a little on one side of his head—and he re-buttoned his coat, which he had loosened in order to walk with more ease and convenience.

He was acquainted with Mrs Greene, and frequently stopped to talk with her as he passed ; and, as he approached now, he took off his hat, and made what would have been a very imposing bow had he not unluckily slipt at a critical moment on a pebble, and thus impaired the dignity of the obeisance.

"A lovely evening, Mrs Greene," said Mr Randy, whose courtesy was somewhat ponderous and antique, and whose conversation, when he was on his stilts, rather resembled scraps from a paper of the *Rambler* than the discourse of ordinary men. "Happy are

you, my good Mrs Greene, who, 'far from the busy hum of men' " (whenever Mr Randy indulged in a quotation he made a pause before and after it), "can dwell placidly in such a scene as this. A scene," added Mr Randy, looking round at the house and garden with a gratified air—"a scene that Horrus would have revelled in. A pleasant life, is it not, my good madam?"

"It's lonesome," said Mrs Greene.

"The better for meditation," returned Mr Randy didactically. "What says the poet?—'My mind to me a kingdom is,'—and who could desire a fairer dominion? Ay" (shaking his head and smiling seriously), "with a few favourite authors, and with the necessaries of life, one might be content to let the hours slip by here without envying the proud possessors of palluses."

Though Jennifer admired this style of conversation exceedingly, she was hardly equal to sustaining it. "You seem to be a good deal with Squire Dubbley, Mr Randy," she said.

Mr Randy answered in the affirmative, taking, at the same time, a pinch of snuff.

"He's a queer one, they say," said Jennifer. "I should think 'twas tiresome for a book-learned gentleman like you, Mr Randy, to be so much in his company."

"Not at all, Mrs Greene," said Mr Randy. "What says the Latin writer?—'Homo sum, nihil humanum a me alienum puto,' which means, my good madam, that, being myself a human being, I am interested in all that appertains to humanity. I study the Squire with much satisfaction."

"He's a gay man the Squire," said Jennifer sententially. "Why don't he marry and live respectable, I wonder? Hasn't he got a lady in his eye yet, Mr Randy?"

"Marriage is a serious thing, my good Mrs Greene—a very serious thing indeed. No," said Mr Randy, confidentially: "what he wants is a housekeeper, Mrs Greene, such a one as some gentlemen I could name are so fortunate as to possess—a respectable, careful person, who could take care of his domestic affairs, and prevent him from being fooled by any idle hussy of a servant-maid who may happen to have an impudent, pretty face of her own."

"I should like," said Jennifer, with compressed lips and threatening eyes—"I should like to see any such show their impudent faces in a house where I was. They wouldn't come again in a hurry, I can tell 'em." And, indeed, it was very likely they would not.

"Ah," said Mr Randy, in deep admiration, "Mr Young is a fortunate man. He has secured a house-

keeper whom we may safely pronounce to be one in a thousand."

Jennifer, though austere, was not quite steeled against flattery. She looked on the learned man with prim complacency—she remembered that her tea had now stood long enough—and she suggested that perhaps Mr Randy's walk had disposed him for some refreshment, and she should take his company during the meal as a favour.

Mr Randy was not particularly addicted to tea: on all those points for which it has been extolled—as a stimulant, as a refresher, as an agreeable beverage—he considered it to be greatly excelled by brandy-and-water. But the subject just touched upon was one in which he was greatly interested, and he resolved to follow up an idea that had occurred to him; so he courteously accepted Jennifer's invitation, and followed her into the parsonage.

Mrs Greene's room was a model of order, rather too much so perhaps for comfort—and showed other traces of her presiding spirit in a certain air of thriftiness which pervaded it. Reigning supreme, as Jennifer did in the Curate's household, she might have indulged in small luxuries at her pleasure had she possessed any taste for them, but the practice of saving, for its own sake, afforded her positive delight. The shelves were rather sparingly furnished

with jam-pots of very small dimensions, carefully tied down and corded, and marked with the name of the confection, and the year of its manufacture; various boxes and canisters, labelled as containing different groceries, were securely padlocked, as if they were not likely to be opened on light or insufficient grounds; the curtains rather scantily covered the window, and the carpet was too small for the floor.

Jennifer, unlocking the tea-caddy, put in two additional spoonfuls of tea in consideration of her guest. Then she invited Mr Randy to sit down, which he did with great ceremony; while she placed on the table two saucers of jam, helped Mr Randy to toast and butter, and some of the sweatmeat, and poured out the tea. And Mr Randy observing that Jennifer transferred hers to her saucer, for the better convenience of drinking, not only did the like, but also blew on the surface to reduce the temperature before the successive gulps, which were then both copious and sonorous.

"So the Squire's not a good manager, eh, Mr Randy?" said Jennifer, after some little conversation on indifferent matters.

"No comfort, no elegance," said Mr Randy. "The superintending hand of a female is greatly wanted."

"And does the Squire think of getting a housekeeper?" asked Jennifer.

"I've not suggested it to him as yet," returned her guest, "but I'm thinking of doing so, if I could fix my eye on a proper person."

"Bless me, you've got no preserve," said Jennifer, emptying, in a sudden access of liberality, the saucer of damsons on Mr Randy's plate. "And there's nothing but grounds in your cup—perhaps you'd like it a little stronger, sir."

"No more, my good madam, I'm obliged to you," said that gentleman, drawing away his cup, and covering it with his hand to show he was in earnest, so that Jennifer, pressing ardently upon him with the tea-pot, very nearly poured the hot tea upon his knuckles. "I've had quite an abundance—quite a sufficiency, I assure you. No, ma'am, things do not go on at Monkstone precisely as I could wish in all respects. For instance, it would be agreeable to me sometimes to find an attentive female to receive me—to say to me, Mr Randy you are wet, won't you have a basin of soup to warm you?—or, Mr Randy, it rains, you'll be the better of a glass of spirits and water to fortify you against the inclemency of the elements. Mr Dubbley is very kind, but these little things don't occur to him."

"Indeed, then, I think they might," said Mrs Greene with warmth. "The least he could do is to be civil. Take some toast, sir."

"'Tis forgetfulness, Mrs Greene, not incivility—a sin of omission, not of commission. I flatter myself few men would venture to be uncivil to me," and Mr Randy drew himself up and looked majestic. "Then the want of a proper person in the house obliges him to look more closely after some small matters than is quite becoming in a man of property."

"Closeness," said Jennifer, with great disdain, "is what I never could abide. I could forgive anything better than that."

"Well, well, Mrs Greene," said her visitor, waving his hand, "we won't be hard upon him—he means well. Yes, I've been looking out for some time for a lady that would answer the Squire's purpose."

"And what kind of person would be likely to suit you?" inquired Jennifer with interest.

"We should require," said Mr Randy, brushing some crumbs from his lap with his pocket-handkerchief, as he concluded his meal—"we should require a character not easy to be met with ;—a sensible—respectable—experienced—discreet—per-r-son—and one, too, who would not give herself presumptuous airs, but would conduct herself towards me—me, Mrs Greene, as I could wish."

"Of course," said Jennifer, "if she was beholden to you for her place, 'twould be her duty to make things pleasant to you, sir."

"Ah," said Mr Randy, "*you* are both a discreet and a sensible person, Mrs Greene, I perceive."

"And as to terms, Mr Randy," suggested Jennifer.

"As to terms, they would be hardly worth higgling about, Mrs Greene—for, if the lady possessed the manifold merits I have enumerated, and allowed herself to be guided in all things by me, why, she would be *de facto*—that is to say, in reality—mistress of Monkstone, and might feather her nest to her own liking."

This was a dazzling prospect indeed, and well calculated to appeal to the heart of Jennifer. There was a grand indefiniteness as to the extent of power and profit which might be acquired, which she found inexpressibly alluring ; for Jennifer was, after her fashion, ambitious, though her ambition was of too practical a nature to set itself on objects hopelessly remote.

Mr Randy perceiving the effect of what he had said, and considering it would be well to give her time to digest it before entering into details, now rose to take leave.

"Good evening, sir, and thank you," said Jennifer. "When you're passing another day, I hope you'll look in ;" and Mr Randy, having promised to do so, walked with his customary dignity up the road.

Mr Randy had not directly said that he thought Jennifer, if she would agree to share interests with

him, would be exactly the person he wanted ; nor had Jennifer directly stated that, if she succeeded in obtaining the post of housekeeper to the Squire, she would show her gratitude by being all Mr Randy could wish. But the knowledge of human nature displayed by the Randies and Jennifers is intuitive and unerring, so long as it is employed upon natures on a level with their own ; and Jennifer knew perfectly well that Mr Randy wanted her for the furtherance of his own designs at Monkstone ; while Mr Randy never doubted that the lure he had held out would secure her.

Jennifer, however, had by no means made up her mind to accept the offer at once. It was dazzling, certainly ; but, on the other hand, she did not like the idea of giving up her long and persevering designs upon the Curate's heart, which, as the reader knows, she had from the first been determined to attack. That was too grievous a waste of time and subtlety to be contemplated. But Mr Randy's implied offer gave her an opportunity of carrying into execution a scheme she had long meditated. She considered (her cogitations being assisted by a third cup of tea, obtained by putting fresh water in the teapot after Mr Randy's departure) that she had now lived so long with the Curate that she could not possibly become more necessary to him than she already

was—that the sooner he was brought to the point the better—that being such an absent person, far from making any proposals of the kind she desired of his own accord, a very strong hint from herself would be required in order to extract them. Now if she resolved upon giving this hint, she must also be prepared to quit the parsonage in case of failure; and Monkstone would form exactly the point she wanted to retreat upon.

This secured, she would commence operations at once with the Curate. He was, in Jennifer's estimation, a man who did not know his own mind or his own interests. But though he might never discover what was for his own good unassisted, yet a man must be foolish indeed who can't perceive it when 'tis shown him. From frequent victories obtained over the Curate, and long managing and ruling him, she flattered herself she might now make her own terms, for that he could never bear to part with her; but if she deceived herself in this, why, then Monkstone would be a more lucrative place. So in any case she should gain some end, and she determined to put her powers of cajolery to proof without delay. Indeed, there was no time to lose, for that very morning Miss Rosa had signified her intention of coming to live with her brother when the ladies left the Heronry.

CHAPTER XL.

FOR many weeks the poor Curate had been indeed alone ; for so long had his old companions, hope and cheerfulness, deserted him ; for so long had he gone mechanically about his old pursuits, feeling that the glory had departed from them, and sat in the stormy autumn evenings, by a hearth where only the vacant pedestals reminded him of the wonted presence of household gods.

Time, of whose lapse heretofore he had taken little note, became now a dull, remorseless enemy. The Curate, when he woke, would sometimes shudder at the prospect of the many-houred day between him and the grateful oblivion of sleep ; for the day, formerly so busy, was now to him but a long tract of weary, reiterated sorrows.

Though he still spent many hours in his garden, it was lamentable to see the change there. Weeds sprung unregarded side by side with his choicest

flowers—worms revelled in his tenderest buds—and the caterpillars were so numerous as to form quite an army of occupation. His books, too, were blank to him—the pages he used to love seemed meaningless. His only remaining consolation was his pipe.

See, then, the Curate sitting in the twilight in his elbow-chair, in an attitude at once listless and uncomfortable, his waist bent sharply in, his head drooping, one leg gathered under the seat, the other straddling towards the fire, his right hand shading his eyes, while the elbow rests on the table—the left holding the bowl of his pipe, while the elbow rests on the arm of his chair. Frequently he takes the mouthpiece from his lips, sighs heavily, and forgets to smoke—then, with a shake of the head, he again sucks comfort from his meerschaum. There is a tap at the door, which opens slowly—Jennifer looks in at him, and then draws near.

Jennifer stopt—looked at him—sighed—then drew a little closer—sighed again. The Curate, fancying she had come on some of her accustomed visits of inspection (for of late she had found frequent excuses for entering, such as to dust his books, to stir his fire, to draw his curtains), took no notice of her, but continued to pursue his train of thought. Presently he too sighed; it was echoed so sympathetically by Mrs Greene, that her suspiration sounded

like a gust coming down the chimney. Finding that the Curate, as usual, pursued the plan which is popularly attributed to apparitions in their intercourse with human beings, and was not likely to speak till spoken to, Jennifer, with a little cough, came round between the table and the fire, and stirred the latter. Being thus quite close to the Curate, with the table in her rear, and her master's chair close to her left hand, she commenced.

"I'm vexed to see you so down, Mr Young. I'm afraid you're not satisfied in your mind. You used to be a far cheerfuller gentleman than what you are now."

Mr Young, rousing himself, looked up with an assumed briskness.

"It's my way, Mrs Greene—only my way."

"No, sir," said Jennifer, peremptorily, "'tis not your way, asking your pardon. There's something on your mind. Perhaps it's me—perhaps things have not gone according to your wishes in the house. If it's me, sir, say so, I beg."

"You, Mrs Greene—impossible. I'm quite sensible of your kind attention to my comforts, I assure you," protested the Curate.

"Because," said Jennifer, heedless of his disclaimer, and going on as if he had not uttered it—"because, if so, I wish to say one word. I only wish

to remark, sir, that whatever fault there is of that kind, 'tis not a fault according to my will. My wish is, and always has been, to serve you to the utmost of my"—

"Mrs Greene!" began the Curate, touching her on the arm with the extended stem of his meerschaum, to check her volubility for a moment, "my good soul"—

—"To the utmost of my ability," went on Jennifer, with a slight faltering in her voice. "If laying down my life could have served you, Mr Young, I'm sure"— Here Jennifer whimpered.

"Faithful creature!" thought the Curate, "what an interest she takes in me! My dear Mrs Greene," said he, "your doubts wrong me very much; but this proof of your care for me is exceedingly gratifying"—which was perhaps an unconscious fib, for the Curate felt more embarrassment than gratification.

"And after all my trials and efforts, thinking only how I could please you, to see you—oh—oh—" and Jennifer broke down again, and in the excess of her agitation sat down on a chair near her. And though to sit down in his presence was a quite unusual proceeding on her part, yet the Curate was so heedless of forms, that if she had seated herself on the mantelpiece, he would possibly have thought it merely a harmless eccentricity.

"Calm yourself, Mrs Greene," entreated the Curate. "These doubts of my regard are quite unfounded; be assured I fully appreciate your value."

"But in that case," said Jennifer, pursuing her own hypothesis with great perseverance, "in that case I must quit you, whatever it costs me. And I hope you could find them, Mr Young, as would serve you better."

"Don't talk of quitting me, Mrs Greene," said the Curate soothingly. "This is all mere creation of your fancy. I am perfectly satisfied—more than satisfied with you."

"No, sir—I've seen it—I've seen it this some time. You don't look upon me like what you used. 'Tisn't any longer, 'Mrs Greene, do this,' and 'Mrs Greene, do that,' and the other. You can do without Mrs Greene now. And perhaps," said Jennifer, "'tis better I was—gone" (the last word almost inaudible).

"Really, Mrs Greene, this is quite unnecessary. You are paining yourself and me to no purpose. Be persuaded"—(and the Curate took Jennifer's hand)—"be persuaded of my sense of your merits"

Jennifer wiped her eyes; then starting and looking round over her shoulder, "O sir," said she, "if anybody should catch us!—what would they say?"

"Catch us, Mrs Greene," said the Curate, hasten-

ing to withdraw his hand ; but Jennifer clutched it nervously.

"Stop !" said Jennifer, "there's a step—and that maid's got such a tongue ! No, 'twas my fancy—the maid's asleep in the kitchen. O, sir—yes, what would they say ?—people is so scandalous. They've been talking already."

"Talking !" exclaimed Mr Young, withdrawing his hand with a jerk. "What can you mean, Mrs Greene ? Talking of what ?"

"O yes !" said Jennifer. "They've been remarking, the busy ones has, how it comes that a lone woman like me could live so long with a single gentleman. Many's the bitter thought it gave me."

"Good heavens, Mrs Greene !" cried the Curate, pushing his chair, which ran on castors, away with a loud creak, "really this is all very strange and unexpected."

"And more than that," pursued Jennifer, "they've said concerning my looks—but I couldn't repeat what they said, further than to mention that they meant I wasn't old nor ugly—which perhaps I am not. And they know what a good wife I made to Samuel" (this was the deceased shipmaster's Christian appellation)—"never, as Mrs Britton that keeps the grocery said to me last Wednesday, never was a better. And when 'twas named to me what they'd

been saying, I thought—O good gracious!—I thought I should have sunk into the hearth.”

“Gracious goodness!” exclaimed Mr Young, starting from his chair, and pacing the room in great perturbation. “How extremely infamous! Why, ’tis like a terrible nightmare. To spread false reports—to drive me to part with a valuable servant—’tis atrocious! I’m afraid, Mrs Greene, you really had better go to-morrow. I need not say how I regret it, but what you have told me renders it imperative.”

“I wish it mayn’t be too late, sir,” said Jennifer, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

“Too late!—too late for what?” inquired the Curate.

“And where do you think I’m to get another place? Who’ll take in a lone woman, whose character have been breathed upon? Oh, that ever I should have seen Lanscote parsonage!” cried Jennifer, choking.

“But, Mrs Greene,” said the agitated Curate, stopping in his walk to lean his hands on the table, and looking earnestly at her, “it shall be my care, as it is my duty, to prove the falsehood of these reports. You shall not suffer on my account, believe me. If necessary, I’ll expose the wicked slander from the pulpit.”

This wouldn’t have suited Jennifer at all. The Curate was going off quite on the wrong track, and

she made a last effort to bring him into the right direction.

"And my—my—my feelings," sobbed she, "ain't they to be considered? Oh, that ever I should be a weak foolish woman! Oh, that ever I should have been born with a weak trustful heart!"

"I daresay 'twill be painful to leave a place where you have lived long, and a master who I hope has been kind to you," said the Curate. (Jennifer lifted up her voice here, and writhed in her chair.) "No doubt it will, for you have an excellent heart, Mrs Greene. But what you have said convinces me of the necessity of it. And you shall be no loser; until you can suit yourself with a place, I'll continue your salary as usual."

"Salary!" cried Jennifer, starting from her chair. "Oh, that I should be talked to like a hireling! God forgive you, Mr Young. Well, it's over now. I'll consider what you've said, Mr Young, and I'll try—try to bring my mind to it."

Jennifer rose—sobbed a little—looked at her chair as if she had a mind to sit down again, and then prepared to depart. In her way out of the room, she passed close to the Curate, and paused, almost touching him, with her handkerchief to her eyes. "If ever he'd say the word, he'd say it now," thought Jennifer, weeping copiously. But Mr Young, far

from availing himself of the proximity to take her hand, or say anything even of comfort, far less of a tenderer nature, retreated with great alacrity to his original post near the fire, and Jennifer had no alternative but to walk onward out of the room.

She left him, roused, certainly, most effectually from his melancholy ; but the change was not for the better. The poor shy Curate was exactly the man to feel the full annoyance of such reports as, according to Jennifer, were in circulation. He fancied himself an object of derision to all Lanscote—how could he hope to do any good among parishioners who said scandalous things of him and his housekeeper? How could he hope to convince them of his innocence? How preserve his dignity in the pulpit, with the consciousness that a whole congregation were looking at him in a false light?

Jennifer's demeanour next day was sad and subdued. After breakfast she came into the room, and, without lifting her eyes, said that she thought she had better go next Wednesday. "On Wednesday," said Jennifer, "Miss Rosa's coming, and then, with your leave, I'll quit, Mr Young."

The Curate highly approved of this ; he knew he could not feel easy till she was out of the house, and meanwhile he absented himself from it as much as possible.

It was fortunate for the Curate that the period of her stay was so short, for she took care it should be far from pleasant. She personally superintended the making of his bed, which she caused to slope downwards towards the feet, and at one side, so that the hapless occupant was perpetually waking from a dream in which he had been sliding over precipices ; and, re-ascending to his pillow for another precarious slumber, would be again woke by finding his feet sticking out from beneath the clothes, and his body gradually following them. He got hairs in his butter, and plenty of salt in his soup ; his tea, the only luxury of the palate that he really cared about, and that rather on intellectual than sensual grounds, grew weaker and weaker ; his toast simultaneously got tougher ; and he was kept the whole time on mutton-chops, which, from their identity of flavour, appeared to have been all cut from the same patriarchal ram.

Wednesday arrived. The Curate, leaning over his garden gate, saw the carriage from the Heronry coming down the lane. It drew up at the parsonage ; in it were Lady Lee, Orelia, and Rosa, all in black, and all looking very sad. Rosa, rising to take leave of her friends, underwent innumerable embraces.

Orelia was the calmest of the three, but even her

grandeur and stateliness quite gave way in parting. "Good-by, Rosalinda," was all she could trust herself to say, as Rosa alighted.

The Curate had intended to say a great deal to Hester, but it had all vanished from his mind, and remained unexpressed, unless a long pressure of the hand could convey it. Lady Lee gave several things in charge to the Curate to execute, and delivered a purse to him, the contents of which were to be distributed among various pensioners in the village; then she told the coachman to drive on.

"Write at least three times a-week, Rosalinda," cried Orelia, putting a tearful face over the hood of the carriage, "or never hope for forgiveness."

They were gone. A white handkerchief waved from the side, and another from the top of the carriage, till it disappeared, and the Curate and his sister slowly turned into the house—the last remnant of the once joyous party assembled at the Heronry.

What a hard thing was life! What a cruel thing was fate, that they could not all be left as they were! Their happiness did no harm to any one—nay, good to many—yet it was inexorably scattered to the winds for ever. So thought the Curate; and so felt Rosa, though perhaps her feelings did not shape themselves into thoughts.

But there was no time just then to indulge their

grief. Scarcely had the carriage departed, when its place was taken by a vehicle of altogether different description. A donkey-cart, destined to convey away Jennifer's chattels, and driven by a small boy, drew up at the gate, producing a kind of practical anticlimax. Then Jennifer, attired in bonnet and shawl, entered, and announced, in an austere and steady voice, that she was ready to hand over her keys of office to the still weeping Rosa.

"Now, Miss," said Jennifer sharply, "if you could make it convenient to come at once, I should be obliged."

"Go with Mrs Greene, my child," said the Curate. When Jennifer found she had failed in her grand design on the Curate, and must quit the parsonage, she did not continue to affect regret at her departure; and having easily and at once secured the coveted post at Monkstone, through the influence of Mr Randy, she felt the change was likely to be for the better. She might, therefore, have been expected to quit her present abode, if with some natural regret, yet at perfect peace and charity with all the household. Jennifer's disposition did not, however, admit of this. She felt enraged at the Curate because of the failure of her design upon him, and resolved to be of as little use as possible in the last moments of her expiring authority. "He'll be wish-

ing me back again before a week's over his head," said Jennifer to herself, with infinite satisfaction.

In vain Rosa protested against being dragged into every corner of the house, and having every bit of household property set before her eyes. In vain she assured Mrs Greene that both her brother and herself were perfectly satisfied of the correctness of everything. "'Twas a satisfaction to herself," Jennifer said, "to show everything;" and it really was, for the extreme bewilderment and ignorance of Rosa on all points of housekeeping afforded Jennifer the keenest gratification. The Heronry, where Rosa's chief business had been to amuse herself, was a very bad school to learn anything of the sort.

Accordingly, Jennifer did not spare her the enumeration of a single kitchen implement, pot of jam, nor article of linen.

"The bed and table linen's all in this press," said Jennifer, opening a large one of walnut wood in the spare bedroom.

"These are the sheets, I suppose, Mrs Greene," Rosa remarked, wishing to show an interest in the matter.

"Bless you, they're the table-cloths!" returned Jennifer, with a glance of disdain.

"Oh, to be sure! And these are towels?" resumed Rosa.

"Napkins," said Jennifer, with calm superiority.

"Mr Young's shirts, and collars, and bands, and neckcloths, is all in these two drawers. Do you understand much about clear-starching, Miss?"

"N—n—no; I am afraid not much," said Rosa.

"Ah, 'twould be just as well you should, perhaps, because the washerwoman requires a deal of looking after. She can be careless and impudent, too, when she dares, especially when she's in drink. She never ventured upon any tricks with *me*, though."

The thought of this terrible washerwoman made Rosa tremble, while Jennifer secretly exulted in the thought of seeing the Curate in limp collars and a crumpled shirt.

"There," said the ex-housekeeper, locking up the press, and handing the key to Rosa; "I advise you, Miss, to take out everything that's wanted yourself. The girl's hands is generally dirty, and, besides, in taking out one thing she drags all the rest out upon the floor. Oh, she's a nice one, that girl!—the work I've had to manage her! Well, Miss, I hope you'll keep an eye upon her, that's all."

Having thus rendered Rosa as uncomfortable as possible at the prospect before her, Jennifer at length prepared to depart. Opening the door of the sitting-room, she said to the Curate, "The young lady's seen

everything, and is quite satisfied. Well, good-bye, and wishing you well, sir." But the benediction was quite contradicted by the ferocity of her look and tone.

"Good-bye, good-bye, my good Mrs Greene," said the Curate, who could not help regarding Jennifer as a martyr. "I wish you all success and happiness ; I hope you won't fret too much after the parsonage, Mrs Greene."

"Ho, no," said Jennifer, with an ironical little laugh ; "it's not likely."

"I'm heartily glad of that," said the Curate, who would not have detected irony even in Dean Swift ; "and I hope you'll soon get another and as good a place."

"I've got one," said Jennifer, "as good a one as ever I could wish."

"Indeed ! that is fortunate," said the Curate ; "and when do you go to it then ?"

"I'm going now," said Jennifer. "Ho, bless you ! as soon as 'twas known I was going to leave this, I had more offers than enough. I took Monkstone," said Jennifer, "being 'twas near my friends in the village. Wishing you good-bye, sir,"—here she dropt a curtsey, and closed the door. The boy had already conveyed her trunks and bandboxes to the donkey-cart. Jennifer marched past the window (from

whence the Curate was watching this exodus) in austere majesty, and never deigned to turn her head. Then she, the boy, the donkey-cart, and the band-boxes, all went in procession down the road, leaving Rosa sole superintendent of the Curate's household.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE friendship which Bruce at this time conceived for Josiah was uncommonly warm and sudden. Though always well disposed towards the worthy Curate, he had not, while Rosa was living at the Heronry, taken much pains to seek his society, but he now became of a sudden a frequent visitor to the Parsonage. He showed great interest in flowers, though he hardly knew a dahlia from a polyanthus; he listened to details of parish matters with an attention quite wonderful, considering how little taste he had that way; and he became enamoured of those old English authors who were Josiah's especial favourites. Finding these manifold pretences insufficient to account for the frequency of his visits, he hit upon a project for rendering them quite plausible. He insisted on subscribing fifty pounds towards a school-house that was to be built in the village under the Curate's auspices; and when Josiah protested

against this liberality as indiscreet and uncalled for, he hinted that it was not altogether disinterested—that his classical knowledge was getting rusty—that he perceived Josiah to be often unoccupied for an hour or two of a morning—and proposed they should read some Latin together.

The Curate liked the project much; it would divert his thoughts from painful subjects—his own classics wanted rubbing up—he had a great regard for Bruce, whose openness, vivacity, and good-nature had quite won his heart, and the readings commenced forthwith.

They were carried on upon a plan which, however agreeable to the master and his disciple, was scarcely calculated to answer the proposed end. Bruce and Josiah would sit down together with their Horace, or their Virgil, or their Terence before them, and for a time would read away with tolerable diligence. Presently Rosa, coming into the room from some household avocation, would trip across it softly, not to disturb them—get what she was in quest of, perhaps a cookery-book, and go off in the same silent fashion, with a nod and a smile at Bruce. At this stage of the lesson the student's attention would begin to waver; he would look a good deal oftener at the door than upon his page. Perhaps shortly after Rosa would re-enter, to request Josiah to get from the garden some celery, parsnip, or other

winter vegetable, of which she stood in need for culinary purposes. "Why didn't you ask me before, when I was in the garden, my child?" the Curate would say, which, indeed, she might very well have done; and Josiah, rising with a sigh to comply with her request, would be forcibly reseated by Bruce, who would desire him to try again at that crabbed bit of Latinity, while *he* went to get what Miss Rosa wanted. Whereupon he and Rosa would repair to the garden together, she pointing out what she wanted, while Bruce supplied her with it; and the Curate, after looking dreamily about for their re-entrance, would forget them altogether, plunging either into a reverie or into a book.

Sometimes Bruce found the Curate absent on some clerical or parochial errand, and on these occasions he thought no apology necessary for his stay, nor did Rosa expect one. If she was too busy to talk to him in the study, he would repair to the kitchen, and even take a share in the culinary mysteries to which that region is sacred, though his presence did not perhaps, on the whole, contribute to the excellence of the cookery. I have always suspected that King Alfred, when he let the cakes burn, was making love to the herdsman's wife, and that the idea of her scolding him for negligence was devised to conceal her share in the delinquency.

Mr Oates, seeing the state of affairs between them, grew quite morose, and would hardly speak to Bruce at breakfast-time. He addicted himself to the society of Suckling, and attempted to divert his thoughts by getting up a scratch pack of harriers, and hunting them himself; and might be heard two or three times a-week in the woods about Doddington, attended by the fast spirits of the place, hallooing, and "pouring through the mellow horn his pensive soul."

Rosa had none of the dignity which in Lady Lee and Orelia could always have kept the most impassioned lovers under a certain restraint. It is well known to be the duty of young ladies to affect total ignorance of the fact that they are objects of adoration, and to harrow up the souls of their admirers with affectation of indifference, at any rate until coming to the point of proposal. Rosa, however, showed undisguised pleasure at Bruce's visits, and one day, when he came in with a melancholy face, and told her the detachment was to leave Doddington immediately, she began to cry.

The Curate was from home that morning, and Bruce had found Rosa in the kitchen, rolling paste for mince-pies, while the cat Pick, whom she had, when leaving the Heronry, brought with her to the Parsonage, sat on the table, watching the process,

and occasionally putting out his paw to arrest the motion of the rolling-pin. The smile with which she looked up at Bruce's entrance turned to a look of sympathetic sadness, as she perceived his sorrowful aspect. He stood by her at the end of the table, and told her the news which had come that morning.

"You see what a life ours is," said Bruce, trying to smile; "here to-day, gone to-morrow. And when we were going to spend such a pleasant winter too!"

"And won't you be here at Christmas?" said Rosa; "and won't you have any of the mince-pies after all? And is there to be an end of our rides, and walks, and evening readings?"

"I'm afraid so," said Bruce, shaking his head. "The troop that relieves us will be here to-morrow week—though, in my opinion," he added, with a faint attempt at pleasantry, "the best way to relieve us would be to let us alone."

"And won't you be coming back?" asked Rosa, with sorrow shining moistly in her blue eyes.

"I fear not," said Bruce, "though, to be sure, it might be managed. But you won't wish that when you've made acquaintance with our successors. The new-comers will take the place of your old friends, and you'll forget us—won't you, Miss Rosa?"

This highly sincere speech was too much for Rosa. "No—oh, no—ne—never!" sobbed she, sinking on

a chair, and burying her face on her plump arms as they lay folded on the table.

Bruce had certainly supposed she would be sorry to hear he was going, but this display of sympathy surpassed his expectations. He stooped down over her—he whispered that nothing should prevent him from coming back—he also mentioned that she was “a dear little thing,” and spying a little white space amid her hair, between her ear and her cheek, and the whispering having brought his lips into that neighbourhood, he thought he would kiss it, and did so. Rosa wept on, which distressed the humane young man so much, that, after begging her, in vain, to look up and be comforted, he managed to insinuate his hand between her cheek and her arms, and to turn her face, using the chin as a handle, gently towards him. A flushed, tearful, glistening face it was; and really, considering the temptation and proximity, one can't altogether blame him for kissing it, which he did both on the eyes and lips; and then, turning it so that his left cheek rested against hers, with only the tresses between, as he whispered in her left ear, while her glistening eyes appeared over his shoulder, he did his best to pacify her. And so absorbed was he in whispering, and she in listening, that the cat Pick, advancing along the flat paste (from which he had only been kept

before by the terror of the rolling-pin), and leaving his foot-marks on the soft substance, proceeded, with the utmost effrontery, to lick up, under their very noses, the little dabs of butter dotted thereon. He made a good deal of noise in doing so; but as Bruce, between the whispers, made a noise not altogether dissimilar (for there were constantly fresh tears requiring to be attended to), Pick finished the butter with perfect impunity, and sat up in the middle of the paste, much about the same time that Rosa pushed Bruce gently away, and removed the last moisture from her eyes with her apron.

The two having, by this time, come to an understanding, Bruce suggested that he would write to his father, who, he assured her, was a splendid old fellow, and who would, no doubt, enter into the spirit of the thing immediately, and give his consent like a trump.

Accordingly, he fetched pen, ink, and paper from the study, and sitting at one end of the kitchen-table, while Rosa rolled fresh paste at the other, he indited a very eloquent and enthusiastic epistle to his parent, and having folded and directed it to "The Very Rev. the Dean of Trumpington," put it with great confidence in his pocket.

After this their conversation took a more cheerful turn, and Rosa worked so diligently at her task that

the mince-pies were made, after a receipt which Bruce read out to her from a cookery-book, and were ready for dinner that very day, and Bruce stayed to eat them.

That splendid old fellow the Dean of Trumpington got the letter in due time. It was brought in after dinner by his butler when he was chatting, in a pleasant digestive sort of way, with a couple of old Canons over a bottle of port. He put on his spectacles to peruse it, and as his wife was in the room, and the Canons old friends and admirers of Harry, he proceeded to read it aloud, and had got pretty well into the matter before he discovered its interesting nature. "Why, bless my soul!" interpolated the Reverend Doctor Bruce, in the middle of a warm passage, "the boy's fallen in love!"

"My dearest Harry!" exclaimed Mrs Bruce; and then eagerly added, "go on, love!"

While the reading proceeded, one old Canon, who was married and had a large family, looked fiercely at his glass of port, as he held it between him and the light, and cried "hum!" or "ha!" at the most touching passages; while the other, who was a bachelor, rubbed his hands as he listened, and chuckled aloud.

"Her brother, Mr Young, is a member of your own profession," read the Dean over again slowly. "Sil-

lery" (to the bachelor Canon), "oblige me by touching the bell. Bring the Clergy List," said the Dean to the butler, when the latter entered.

"Y," read the Dean, running his finger down the list, when he got it—"Yorke—Youatt—Young—here you are: Young, George, Vicar of Feathernest (is that him, I wonder? good living Feathernest)—Young, Henry, Prebendary of Durham—Young, Josiah, Curate of Lanscote—that must be the man," said the Dean, referring to the letter; "he dates from Lanscote near Doddington."

"There was a Young at Oxford with me," said Dr Macvino, the married Canon, in a deep, oily, sententious voice. "He left college on coming into six thousand a-year. He might have a daughter," said the Canon, looking round as he propounded the theory. "And," added the Canon, "he might also have a son in the Church. He was a tall fellow, who once pulled the stroke oar in a match, as I remember—he gave remarkably good breakfasts."

"Dear boy!" said Mrs Bruce, apostrophising Harry, "I'm certain he wouldn't make other than a charming choice. I'm certain she's a sweet girl."

"Harry knows what's what," said the Dean; "I've confidence in that boy."

"Plenty of good sense," said the bachelor Canon.

"Good stuff," said Dr Macvino, who, sipping his

wine before he gave the opinion, left it doubtful whether he was praising Bruce junior or the port.

"Harry's got something here," said the Dean, pointing to his forehead. "He's almost thrown away in his present profession. He ought to have come into the Church."

"Decidedly he ought," said Dr Macvino, who thought himself an example to teach other clever fellows how to choose a profession.

"He's the most sensible darling!" said Mrs Bruce; "and I, too, was sorry that he hadn't chosen a learned profession, till I saw him in his uniform. His mustache promised to be beautiful" (there had been perhaps four hairs in it when she last saw him), "and 'tis very becoming."

"Suits him to a hair," said the bachelor Canon, who was a wag in a mild way.

"The boy's letter is a little high flown," said the Dean, "but that was to be expected, perhaps. I remember describing Mrs Bruce there to my family in such terms, that, when I brought her home, they were rather disappointed at finding her without wings. But I've no doubt the young lady is a most proper person."

"A young man like my Harry ought to get a wife with twenty thousand pounds any day," said his mother.

"There were two things, I remember," said Dr Bruce, "that Harry was very fastidious about in women—dress and manner: I venture to prophesy that our future daughter-in-law is irreproachable in both."

"A tall girl, I suspect," said Mrs Bruce.

"Tall, and with a good deal of the air noble—perhaps a little proud," the Doctor went on.

"But not disagreeably so," said Mrs Bruce.

"Certainly not," said the Doctor. "A *hauteur* of manner merely. I like to see a woman keep up her dignity."

"I wish he had said something about her fortune," said Mrs Bruce.

"So do I," said the Doctor, "and I think I'll go down to Doddington to-morrow, and see what he's about. I'm rather in want of change of air." And the two Canons drank success to his journey in another bottle of port.

Accordingly, the next day the doctor went down to Doddington, three counties off, and not finding Harry at his lodgings, got a conveyance and a man to take him over to Lanscote. Bruce was there of course—he had rushed away from the parade that morning, and, without changing his dress, galloped to Lanscote at a tremendous pace. He was not sorry to find the Curate absent, and, going clanking into the kitchen

in his spurs, found Rosa there with a great pinafore on, making a tart.

For about ten minutes after his arrival the manufacture of the tart proceeded but slowly ; and Rosa, to keep him out of her way, begged him to superintend the re-boiling of some preserves, which Jennifer's economy had left to spoil in their jars. "You've nothing to do," said she, "but to sit still before the fire, and skim the pan from time to time with this spoon ; and I'll get you something to keep your uniform clean, while you're doing it." So Rosa went and got a small table-cloth, and causing him to seat himself in the desired position in front of the fire, she pinned it round his neck as if he was going to be shaved—his brass shoulder-scales sticking out rather incongruously from under the vestment.

"I ought to hear from my father, to-day," said Harry, skimming away at the pan with his spoon.

"He won't be angry, I hope," said Rosa, putting a strip of paste round the edge of her tart-dish.

"Angry," said Bruce, "not he. If he was, I should just show you to him, and if he were the most peppery old boy in existence, he'd come to the down charge directly, like a well-bred pointer—just as the lion did before Una. He'd love you directly—I'm certain he would—he must, you know—he couldn't help himself."

"I'm sure I shall love *him*," said Rosa, smiling at Bruce as she took the spoon from him in order to taste the jam, and see how it was getting on.

"Of course you will," said Harry. "As I said before, he's a splendid old fellow."

At this moment a step was heard on the gravel in front of the house, followed by a tapping at the door of the porch, which was open.

"Come in!" cried Bruce. "Come in, can't you!" he repeated, as the tapping was renewed. "I *can't* go to the door in this way," he said to Rosa, looking down at his table-cloth.

"It's only the butcher, or Josiah's clerk, or some of those people," said Rosa; "come in, if you please."

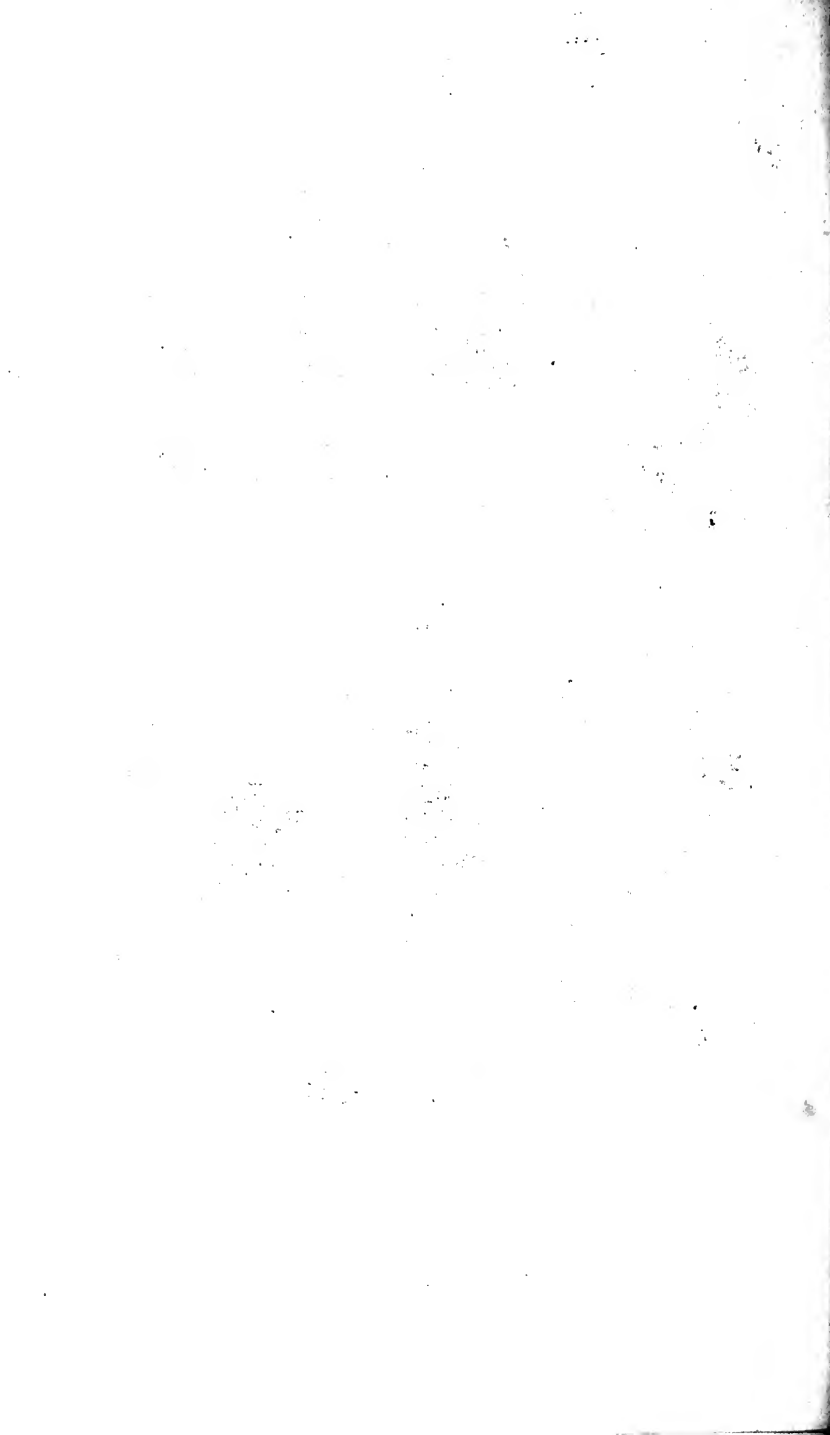
At this the step advanced along the passage, and came to the kitchen door. Bruce, skimming away at his pan, didn't turn round till he heard a voice he knew exclaim behind him, "God bless my soul!" The spoon fell into the brass pan, and disappeared in the seething fruit.

"Why, in heaven's name," said the Doctor, "what is the boy about?"

The boy in question, standing up in great confusion to the height of six feet, with the table-cloth descending like a large cloud about his person, hiding all of it except his military-looking arms and legs, did not make any reply. Rosa, when she tasted the jam, had



and visit to the Parsonage.



left some on her lips, and somehow a splash of it had got transferred to Bruce's face.

"What prank is this, sir?" asked the Dean sternly. "Who is this person?" pointing his thick yellow cane at Rosa. "Is it the cook or the dairymaid?"

"That, sir," said Bruce, coming to Rosa's rescue, "is Miss Young—the lady I wrote to you about."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Doctor, who had not found the answers to the inquiries he made in Doddington as to the worldly condition of the house of Young at all to his mind, and who, at the sight of the Parsonage, had been more struck with its diminutiveness than its picturesqueness. "You're a pretty fellow! Don't you think you're a pretty fellow? Answer me, puppy!"

"I'm not doing any harm, sir," said Bruce, his handsome face looking very red over the table-cloth, which he struggled to unpin.

"Not doing any harm, sir!" sung the Dean after him, through his nose. "Are you making an ass of yourself, sir, do you think? Come, sir, I'm waiting for ye. Come along with me, sir."

Bruce, having got rid of the table-cloth, went up to console Rosa, who was now sobbing in a chair.

"Are ye coming, sir?" shouted the Dean from the door; and Bruce, with a last whisper of comfort,

went to join his parent, who, lifting his shovel-hat, said, "Ma'am, I wish you a very good morning!" As they went through the passage, Rosa heard the Doctor say something about "What a shock to your poor mother!"

When Josiah returned, he found Rosa weeping by the kitchen fire, now sunk to embers, the jam reduced to a sort of dark concrete, and the tart still in an elemental state.

"Harry's papa has been here," sobbed Rosa; "and he's been so angry; and he's carried Harry away, and I shall ne — never — see him — any mo — re."

The Dean kept such strict watch over his son while the troop remained at Doddington, lecturing him all the time, that he never got the smallest glimpse of Rosa before quitting the place, though he managed to write her some tender and consoling letters. His only other consolation was in confiding his grief to Mr Titcherly, the old antiquary. They had become intimate and fond of one another—"a pair of friends, though he was young, and Titcherly seventy-two." Bruce had sympathised with the old gentleman's pursuits, and aided them—he had, moreover, made drawings illustrative of the great work on the antiquities of Doddington, which were now being engraved for a second edition; and when the troop left

the town, nobody missed him more, nor thought more kindly of him, next to Rosa, than Mr Titcherly.

Bruce had nourished in his secret heart an intention of getting leave when they got to headquarters, and coming back to see Rosa. This was defeated by the vigilance of his parent, who, suspecting the design, made it a particular request to the Colonel that he would allow his son no leave of absence, hinting at an indiscreet attachment ; and the Colonel, in the most friendly way, promised to comply with the Dean's wishes. Afterwards the Dean went home, and told his wife (he being a pious man, and familiar with the ways of Providence) that he considered the moving of the detachment from Doddington in the light of a special interference.

CHAPTER XLII.

FOR my own private choice, I don't know whether I should have preferred to live at Larches or the Heronry. People who like aristocratic-looking houses of imposing size and respectable age would have preferred the latter. But there are others whose ambition does not soar so high—who would feel encumbered by space which they could not occupy, and by galleries and apartments to them superfluous ; yet who have sometimes, when dreaming in a verandah in the tropics, a snow-hut of some northern region, or a narrow cabin at sea, figured to themselves a snug English home, not too remote for the world's affairs, nor too public for seclusion—not so large as to be dull without visitors, nor so small as to be unfit to accommodate them—not so grand as to invite inspection, nor so unadorned as to disappoint it—standing, in fact, on the boundary which divides comfort from ostentation ; and such would have preferred Larches.

Yet, ah ! that air from Queen Anne's time that breathed about the Heronry — that library, where Samuel Johnson might have devoured books in his boyhood — the trim gardens, where Pope might have sat in fine weather, polishing his mellifluous lines — the gateway and porticoes that Vanbrugh might have regarded with paternal complacency, as hooped dames and bewigged cavaliers passed underneath — all these were pleasant to the eye and mind that love the picturesque and antique.

Yet even these advantages would not weigh in the scale for a minute, when Larches was inhabited as now. Place Lady Lee and Orelia in the balance, and the Heronry kicks the beam. They would have made a hut in Tipperary, or South Africa, or any other pagan and barbarous region, more alluring than the palace of Aladdin.

However (to describe its intrinsic advantages), Larches was a one-storied house, too spacious to be called a cottage, which, however, it resembled in shape, and surrounded by a deep verandah open from the eaves to the ground. To please a caprice of Orelia's, the slated roof had been covered with thatch — indeed, she exercised her fancy in so many alterations, both of the house and grounds, that the place was like a dissolving view, and never presented the same appearance for two consecutive seasons.

The house stood on a knoll which raised it above the surrounding garden, except at the back, where the north winds were repelled by a small grove rising from a high bank. In the front rank of this grove rose three tall larches that gave the place its name. The verandah kept the sun from the apartments, but the windows, opening to the ground, admitted plenty of sober light. Looked at from without, the open verandah and the large space occupied by windows and doors gave an idea of extreme airiness; while the rich heavy curtains that lined the windows, and the glimpses of luxurious furniture behind, conveyed ample assurance of comfort.

Hither Orelia had brought her friend, and here she applied herself to soothe her sorrow. Many offices would, perhaps, have suited Orelia better than that of comforter—but her affection and warm sympathy for Lady Lee made her discharge it with right goodwill.

When Hester had entered the hall, at the conclusion of their journey, Orelia came up and kissed her.

“We will forget now,” she said, “that you have ever been Lady Lee. We will revive in substance, as well as in idea, the old times when you were Hester Broome at the parsonage; and we will see if there is not yet in store for you as bright a future as ever you dreamt of in your imaginative days.”

A thin elderly person, holding a handkerchief to her face to keep off the draught, was hovering about an inner door of the lobby as they entered. This was Miss Priscilla Winter, the lady who did propriety in Orelia's establishment, and managed the minor details thereof. She had lived with Orelia's mother as a companion, when the young lady herself was a child, and had subsequently accompanied the latter to Larches. She was a good kind of ancient nonentity, without any very decided opinions on any subject, resembling, indeed, rather a vague idea than an absolute person. As she always had a smile ready, and agreed with everybody, Priscilla was sufficiently popular and endurable. At present she smiled a welcome on one side of her face only, because the other was swelled—a frequent symptom of the perpetual toothach which afflicted her.

"Here's Frisky," said Orelia, on seeing her; "dear old Frisky!—good old Frisk!" and she went up and greeted the old lady very cordially, as did Lady Lee.

Orelia called her Frisky, not because of any particular fitness in the appellation, but, having a way of her own of altering people's names, she used to call her first Priskilla, then, when she wanted to coax her, Prisky, which suggested Frisky, and the total and glaring inappropriateness of the epithet tickled the

inventor so much that it was permanently adopted by her. The old virgin preceded them into the drawing-room, where a comfortable fire was blazing, and told them dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour.

"And how are the live stock, Frisk?"

"All well except Dick, who had a fit yesterday," said Miss Winter, "but he seems quite cheerful again to-day." Dick was a bullfinch.

"I'll see him presently," said Orelia, "but first I must visit Moloch."

"Take care, my dear Orelia," said Priscilla; "Francis has got him chained up—the cook says she thinks he's going mad, for he hasn't drank his water to-day."

"Stuff!" said Orelia, marching out of the room.

Moloch, a great yellow bloodhound, flecked with white, chained in the yard, thundered a deep welcome as his mistress went towards him, and upset his kennel in his eagerness to jump upon her. She unstrapped his collar, and he preceded her backwards in a series of curvets to the drawing-room, yelping joyfully, and nearly upsetting Priscilla, whom Orelia found occupied in settling Lady Lee near the fire, that she might be warm before taking off her things; for the old lady was a great hand at coddling people, if permitted.

"Hester looks pale, poor dear," said Priscilla, with

a heart-rending sadness of tone and aspect—"ah, well, she's had her trials and"—

"Now, I'll tell you what it is, Frisk," interrupted Orelia, looking sternly at the old lady, "I didn't bring her here to be made dismal, and if ever I hear you saying anything of a doleful character, I'll leave a chink of your bedroom window open at night, and give you a stiff neck.—I will, as sure as your name's Frisky." And this speech at once produced the desired effect; the venerable spinster caught her cue with alacrity, and the unswelled side of her face at once assumed an expression of great cheerfulness.

Dinner was presently announced. "I'm afraid the dining-room will be chilly," mumbled Priscilla, "and this terrible face of mine—would you mind it, my dear, if I sat at dinner in my bonnet?"

"Not in the least, my tender Frisk," quoth Orelia; "and pray bring your umbrella and pattens also."

A few days after their arrival, they went down to the parsonage, where Hester had formerly lived with her father. Orelia was curious to see what effect the memories attached to the place would have upon her ladyship. She saw her grow flushed and excited as they passed the familiar cottages, and trees, and fields along the road. She saw her excitement increase as they came in sight of the parsonage. A glimpse of

it was afforded from the road, as it stood at the end of a lane, and looked down upon a lawn dotted with dwarf firs. That glimpse showed it little changed ; but as they entered the swinging gate, opening on the gravel path that curved round to the front of the house, the place seemed to Hester to have dwindled. Perhaps the spacious proportions of the Heronry dwarfed the parsonage by contrast—perhaps her remembrance had flattered the scene—perhaps it had lost its interest together with its former inhabitants—for, her father having died soon after her marriage, a new clergyman now lived there, and neither he nor his wife were likely to renew much of the romantic atmosphere of the spot—at any rate, Hester's associations vanished rapidly. The furniture was all so different : there was a new door opened in the sitting-room, which might be a convenience, but was to her an impertinence—her bedroom, the chamber of her maiden dreams (ah, sacrilege !) was now a nursery. The walls where the echoes of Hester's voice, as she read aloud, or sung, or said her prayers, ought yet to have lingered, resounded to the squalls of the latest baby published by the prolific clergyman's wife, and the clamour of its small seniors. A cradle had taken the place of her bookcase ; and her bed, whose white curtains had once enclosed the poetic dreams and bright fancies of the virgin Hes-

ter—the very altar-place, as it were—was replaced by a rocking-horse with its head knocked off. Scarcely worse the desecration, when the French stabled their chargers in the cathedrals of Spain.

She descended to the porch, and paused there, trying to recall her former self as she had sat in its shadow, reading, working, dreaming, fancying that the world was paradise. She wondered what could have made her fancy so ; it had, indeed, been blissful ignorance, but very silly, nevertheless : her eyes were open now, and she was quite sure—yes, quite—she should never see things again surrounded by such delusive splendour. The Hester of eighteen had been quite a different person from the Hester of twenty-five. And so sad seemed to be the train of thoughts thus aroused, and bringing with it so many silent tears, that Orelia was sorry she had carried her well-intended visit to the parsonage into execution. She mentioned it in a letter to Rosa ; and here, in common type, wherein it loses all the character it gained in the original, from that bold yet feminine hand, with its long upstrokes and downstrokes, and its audacious dashes, we will insert Orelia's letter.

“ Dearest Rosalinda ” (it said), “ what is there about you, do you suppose, that you should be so constantly in my thoughts as you are, to the utter exclusion, of course, of all kinds of rational contem-

plation? For how can any serious or important idea be expected to remain in company with that of a little laughing, red-faced thing? In vain I banish the pert image; it comes back with all the annoying and saucy pertinacity of the original, till I actually catch myself addressing it; and my first impulse, on waking of a morning, always is to pull you out of bed.

“People sometimes say of their deceased relations (especially if they have left them any money), that it would be wrong to wish them back to this scene of trial. And I grow somewhat resigned to your absence, when I think that you are probably much happier where you are. For Hester and I are very dismal, Rosey—not a bit better than we were during the last sad weeks at the Heronry. She grows paler, Rosetta—paler and thinner every day. And I don’t think ’tis owing to any failure of mine in carrying out our plan for her benefit. I have, in every possible way, closed up the avenues to sad recollections. I have avoided all allusions to her married life, as if it had been wiped out of my memory with a great wet sponge. I have nearly choked myself by arresting, on the brink of utterance, observations that might have awakened in her mind some train of thought ending in a sigh. I have endeavoured to interest her in her old occupations here, and to get her to resume the subjects of conversation and of fancy that

used to delight her in the old times, when she was the most enthusiastic and bright and hopeful of friends ; and I have had my labour for my pains. She wandered through my hothouses with most annoying apathy—stood on the very spot where she and I first saw one another, and which I expected would have had an electrical effect on her, with an absence of recognition that quite exasperated me ; and when I wished her good night, in the very bedroom that was always allotted to her when weather bound at my cottage, she returned the benediction without one allusion to the old days that have departed apparently for ever.

“ Well, Rosetta, I persevered, nevertheless—yes, I did—I struck my great *coup*—I took her down to the parsonage, where she was born and bred. Long after her father’s death it stood untenanted ; but a new family now live there. I watched the effect of each familiar object that we passed on the road ; her breath now and then came a little quicker, and, at the first distant glimpse of the house, her colour rose, and she smiled more naturally than she has done any time these three months. ‘ Now,’ said I to myself, ‘ the old Hester is going to peep out of this melancholy mask ; ’ so I said, by way of assisting the metamorphosis, ‘ Do you remember anything about that stone, Hester ? ’ pointing to a great white one by the

side of the road. Now, by this stone hangs a tale, Rosamunda. You must know (if I never told you) that Hester and I had once a little quarrel ; and as it's so long ago, I don't mind saying 'twas all my fault. Well, we did not meet for two or three days, for Hester was hurt, and I was sullen ; but then, by a simultaneous impulse, we started to meet and be reconciled. Hester was near this stone when she caught sight of me, and, forgetting all cause of offence, ran towards me. In her haste ('twould take a deal to make her run now, Rosey) she tript on the grass at the side of the road, and fell with her head against the corner of the stone. There she lay for a moment, stunned, and I, who had just reached the spot, sat down on the stone, and, taking her head on my lap, vowed, after she had opened her eyes, and assured me she was but little hurt, that I would never again offend her.

"She remembered it well, she said, as I stopt and pointed to the spot ; then, pressing my hand, 'Though I am not so demonstrative now as then, you must not think my friendship colder, dear Orelia,' she said. This looked all very promising, and I walked on in great spirits, awaiting the further effect of the coming scenes.

"The clergyman's wife had called on us, so our visit had an excuse. The porch looked just as it

used—we entered ; but there, in the identical spot where Mr Broome used to sit and talk to us, when a pause in his disorder let him brighten up for an hour or two, with the benignity of a Socrates—his pale face glowing, his dim eye kindling, and his failing voice hardly able to keep pace with his eloquent flow of thought—there sat his successor—fat, contented, vulgar. The first words he spoke, in tones that seemed to struggle through layers of beef and cabbage and Yorkshire pudding, dissipated the romance that lingered for me and Hester about the scene. And his wife ! I don't deny that the woman may have good qualities, Rosa ; but I never can forgive her that cap of hers—nor her furniture—nor her younger sister, with her vulgar affectation of well-bred ease—nor her mode of addressing her husband—she called him by the initial letter of his horrible surname.

“ In vain I struggled with these prosaic influences—in vain I tried to recall the old memories of the place—they had absolutely deserted me. I did not look at Hester, for I should only have looked disappointment. I did not speak to her, for I had nothing to say. But I looked at the clergyman and his wife and sister-in-law—daggers, Rosetta—and I was glad, when we departed, to see them reduced to a state of terrified and silent civility.

"So this part of the project signally failed. Hitherto we had lived altogether by ourselves, for I did not wish to annoy her with the task of making a parcel of new acquaintances, not likely to be particularly interesting either to her or to me. But now I thought visitors might rouse her from her melancholy, and I let them come."

The time when Lady Lee and Orelia were most disposed to be communicative to each other was the last hour before they went to bed. Both, after flickering fitfully between dinner and tea, musing, looking into the fire, sighing, &c., would brighten up into temporary effulgence, before undergoing the extinction of sleep.

"You are cheerful to-night, Orelia," said Lady Lee, one night after some guests had departed. "I am happy to see it, my dear. Come closer," said her ladyship, passing her arm round her friend's waist, and drawing her on to the sofa beside her. "I want to whisper to you. May I venture to hope" (this in Orelia's ear, from which she had brushed back the volume of black hair that hid it) "that you have forgotten that little romance of yours?"

Orelia silently turned, and sat facing her with her black eyes, without answering.

"You never confided in me in that matter," said

her ladyship, still whispering, though there was nobody but those two in the room, and the servants had gone to bed. "I shouldn't speak of it now, only that I observe some symptoms occasionally which make me still doubt the direction of your thoughts. Can I help to guide them back to tranquillity?"

"No, Hester," said Orelia; "I don't want any aid. I've come to a resolution of my own accord."

"Tell it me," said Lady Lee.

"How can I tell you all?" said Orelia. "You didn't know him. To you he was merely what he appeared to the world—to me he was himself—the manliest, the cleverest, the most independent, the—ah, you smile; but, had you met him in his true position, you would have thought of him as I do."

Lady Lee squeezed the hand of the somewhat indignant enthusiast. "Who so apt as I to believe," she said, "that when Orelia Payne admires, the object is an elevated one? Well, dearest?"

"Well," said Orelia, "I dreamt at the Heronry a sort of dream—that he would regain his position in the world, and be all you or any of my friends could wish. He left me apparently with some such expectation; but now I see it was fallacious."

"But a man could scarcely make a very great stride in the world in a couple of months," observed Lady Lee.

"'Twill take years, perhaps," said Orelia, "even if he ever succeeds; and consider the chances against him. And, except as successful, I shall never see him—he is prouder than a fallen angel." Here she paused, and pondered a little. "But," she resumed, "I have resolved to think no more on that subject. Yes, resolved!" (stamping with her foot, while her colour heightened, and a tear came into her eye). "It can do no good—it will be vain, weak, idle—it will be wasting life in unreality; therefore it shall end"—(another little stamp).

Lady Lee looked at her with a kind of serious half smile. "So earnest, Orelia!—then the cause cannot be slight."

"It is not," said Orelia petulantly. "I am ashamed to think how much it has engrossed my thoughts. And yet—everything considered—so much merit in so unfitting a position! Had he been placed where he deserves, I should perhaps have withheld my admiration; but indignation at the way in which fortune and the world have treated him lent it double force. Now, Hester, I have been franker than you—for we both had our secrets; had we not?"

It was Lady Lee's turn to redden and be silent.

"Hester," went on Orelia, "what do you think of the men who sometimes come here? Is there one of them fit to be named with either of those to whom we gave—I mean to whom we would have given—our hearts? Think for a moment of the best of them—and then place their images, side by side, with those I speak of. Don't they dwindle?—don't they show like wax-work beside sculpture, with their fleeting hues of character, their feeble melting outlines, their stupid conventionalities?"

"You are severe, my dear," said Lady Lee, without, however, heeding much her own reply—for Orelia had confused her.

"O, it scatters my patience!" said her impetuous friend. "I think less of myself when one of them has hinted admiration. Yesterday, that worthy noodle, Mr Straitlace—he who thinks it good to be wise, but not to be merry, and whose expressive eyebrows proclaim all pursuits to be vanity except his own—had the astonishing effrontery to give my hand a kind of meaning squeeze, at taking leave, muttering something about 'his pleasure at recognising a congenial spirit.' What have I done, Hester, to deserve that?—the owl!"

"I don't see the congeniality, certainly," said Lady Lee, smiling, "more than between an owl and a—peacock, or any other majestic bird."

"Then there's that baronet Sir Dudley (you seem to have an attraction for baronets, Hester)—that well-dressed Mephistopheles, with crow's feet about his eyes and his heart at five-and-twenty, who has just cleverness enough to find out the faulty side of everything—he had the impudence, after looking at you as if he were judging a horse, to pronounce that 'you had some good points,' which from him is equivalent, I suppose, to high praise."

"I hope he specified the points that struck him," said Lady Lee, smiling.

"He hadn't time," returned Orelia. "I felt downright savage at the idea of such a snail as that crawling on your petals. I asked him who had told him of your merits? for that we all knew him to be slow at finding them in anything."

"And what did he say?"

"He turned to his next neighbour and merely said, 'Shut up, by Jove!' Why, compared with these people, Major Tindal grows respectable; for though he has but one side to his character, 'tis a manly and decided one."

"Poor, misguided Major Tindal," said Lady Lee; "to think that he should have taken the trouble to come all the way here" (the Major hadn't been able to forbear singeing his wings again), "just to do hopeless homage to a girl who talks of him in that way."

"Certainly he had better have stayed at Dodding-ton," said Orelia. "But, now, Hester, tell me—could you admire, or ever be induced to love, any of our present acquaintances, after having seen others so much worthier?"

"I will go farther than that," said Lady Lee, resuming her habitual tone of melancholy, which she had relinquished for one of assumed gaiety, merely to cover the confusion that Orelia's homethrust had caused her; "I will say that we never could have admired or loved them in any case."

"And yet they are not below the average of those we shall meet in our pilgrimage," said this severe censor; "and that brings me to a subject I have for some time thought of. You and I can never link our lives to people of that sort."

"Never," said Lady Lee, fervently.

"Neither will we spend them in vain regrets," said Orelia. "In men that would be unmanly, and in us 'twould equally be unwomanly. We will drive out thought—we will leave it no avenue to enter—we will place a quickset round our hearts. Some do this by openly relinquishing the world, and taking vows; our resolutions shall be none the weaker because we only take our vows privately, and to one another."

Lady Lee looked at her friend inquiringly.

"Why should we have done with life because we have been disappointed in one of its objects?" said Orelia. "Why should we languish or let ourselves rust because those we prefer are withheld from us? We could not be content to go lingering and dreaming all our lives."

"Not content, certainly," said Lady Lee. "But what are we to do?"

"Make business for ourselves in the world," said Orelia. "Be of use—turn our energies to account. How many women younger than we quit a life of ease without our provocation, and devote themselves to one of active usefulness! We might be the founders of an unprofessed sisterhood. What do you say, Hester? When shall we begin?"

"When?" said Lady Lee. "My dear, such a thing requires thought."

"Say a week," said Orelia.

"A week!" cried Lady Lee—"a year you mean. Nuns have a noviciate."

"And a contemptible thing it is," said Orelia, "that hovering between two worlds, as it were—that lingering on the bridge, shilly shally. No, Hester; we won't show any such want of confidence in ourselves—we will begin after a week's trial. We must commence by closing up all paths to thoughts that might unsteady us—lay aside at once poetry, romance,

music, except anthems and oratorios. We will prescribe for ourselves a simple dress and a uniform and disciplined life. Come, are you not anxious to begin?"

"I *do* almost catch a gleam of your enthusiasm," said Hester. "To relinquish my present life will be no privation" (with a sigh). "But we must mature the idea before acting on it. We must not begin lightly."

"Lightly!" said Orelia. "I've been thinking of it these four days. And, for our plan—feeding the poor—educating the ignorant—comforting the sick—there is a field! So much for our duty towards our neighbour—for ourselves, we will improve and occupy our minds with study, and I was going to say meditation; but I'm not so sure whether our meditations would be always on profitable subjects, at least not just yet. When nuns turn out not so good as they might be, who knows what share meditation may have had in it? We'll act now, Hester, and put off meditation till we grow older."

Now, there was something in Orelia's proposal that was not displeasing to Lady Lee. To banish thought which she found so wearisome—to occupy time that hung so heavy—to labour with an object and obtain a result—these were what she had long desired in a dreamy sort of way, and, now that the

more energetic Orelia had struck out the path, she was ardent to follow it. Thus the mind would be provided for ; and, for the heart, why shouldn't she and Orelia, her chosen friend, be all in all to each other ? which last idea was, perhaps, even more brilliant than the other.

Accordingly the noviciate commenced forthwith. They had, in Hester's maiden days, studied together French and Italian ; they now began a spirited attack upon the German language. Mathematics was desirable, as it required attention, exercised the mind, and did not excite the imagination, and they plodded away at Euclid and algebra with a perseverance praiseworthy in an ambitious freshman, but, in them, lamentable to behold. The piano remained unopened, the harp untouched, except on Sunday, when they performed 'a piece out of Handel. Lady Lee's copy of *Corinne* was put in the fire by Orelia, who had never particularly admired the work ; and, indeed, a great part of their library underwent such a weeding as Don Quixote's suffered at the hands of the barber and curate. Both were dressed in mourning before for Julius, so no great change was needed in their attire. To crown all, they discovered, in a couple of days, some babies in the smallpox and croup, three distressed families with the fathers out of work, and a pair of rheumatic old women, so that their chari-

table resolutions were not likely to fail for want of objects.

It is very well known that heroines of respectability ought to be naturally benevolent. They ought, moreover, to have a happy knack of winning the hearts of all who experience their bounty. I would with pleasure bestow on my heroines all the good attributes that belong to them, but I have already said they were far from faultless, and, to say the truth, the line they had chosen was not their forte. Lady Lee's fastidious taste was speedily revolted by misery, whose pathos was impaired by selfishness or coarseness; and Orelia, after a visit to one of the rheumatic patients, left a sovereign for the sufferer, and vowed she would never go near that horrid old grumbler again. In fact, this was one of the points in which they were both of them inferior to Rosa. Their benevolence sprang from a sense of duty, and was artificial in expression, like the conversation of one who has learnt a foreign tongue grammatically; while Rosa's was natural, and fluent in the happiest idioms of goodness.

However, they persevered, and though they were striving against nature, their conduct was quite natural. Women are never so enthusiastic about their duties as when they have just been disappointed in love. Your pretty Puritans are sure to have had an

attachment blighted, and Devotion is called in, like a Beguine, to dress the wounds made by that rascal Cupid.

But yet, reader, if Hester and Orelia should really persist in their project, what a glimpse of the possible is here opened ! Let imagination hold up the curtain for a moment.

Methinks I see Orelia, aged say about thirty-five ; severe of aspect, and with what novelists call "the traces of former beauty," though the arch of the nose has strengthened to Roman firmness, the mouth is quite stern in its decision, and the fire of the eyes has some fierceness in its sparkle. Irreproachable, but not amiable—unsparing to the indiscretions of others, and having none of her own—rigid in the performance of duties, as well as in exacting them—I see her, in fact, become that formidable being, an exemplary woman, and I should like to see anybody make love to her now.

Lady Lee, too, now getting on for forty, has changed from what we knew her. She is not called, like Orelia, an exemplary woman, but is stigmatised by the equally opprobrious epithet, a superior person. Her eyes, dimmed with long perusing of good wearisome books through a veil of tears, are still beautiful in their melancholy, but the rest of her charms have withered. She does not discharge her duties with

the unfailing spirit of the more energetic Orelia, but requires a new weary effort for the performance of each ; and when the old obstinate question recurs of what her business in the world may be, she silences it by a contemplation of the indurated virtues of her friend, which she nerves herself to imitate. There are no more confidences or confessions of weakness between herself and Orelia, but a friendship such as might have subsisted between the Mother of the Gracchi and Mrs Fry. They are punctual in ——, but, as Sterne says, when the idea of his captive becomes too painful, “I cannot sustain the picture that my fancy has drawn.” Fane—Onslow—to the rescue !

CHAPTER XLIII.

A SHORT time after the loss of poor Julius, Bagot had gone to town without seeing Lady Lee in the interval. The night of his arrival he wrote a note to Seager, desiring, that gentleman to come to him in the morning.

Seager came about ten o'clock to the lodgings occupied by Bagot, expecting to find him up and dressed. As he was not in the sitting-room, Seager proceeded up-stairs to his bed-room. He was met at the head of the stairs by Wilson, the Colonel's servant, who told him he feared his master was ill. "He had been talking queer," Wilson said—"very queer."

Seager entered the bed-room. The Colonel was in bed, and did not look ill, but his friend observed that he cast a peculiar hurried anxious glance at the door as he entered. He went up to him, shook hands, congratulated him on the late event, and then seated himself on the side of the bed.

"What makes you so late in bed?" asked Seager; "keeping it up late last night, eh?"

"No," said Bagot, "no. I want to get up—but how can I, you know, with these people in the room?" (casting a quick nervous glance towards a corner of the apartment.)

"Very odd," thought Seager, following the direction of the Colonel's eyes, and seeing no one. "He hasn't lost his wits, I hope. A little feverish, perhaps. I'm afraid you're out of sorts, Lee," he said. "You don't look well."

"Quite well," said Bagot; "never better. I'll get up in a minute, my good fellow, as soon as they're gone. Couldn't you"—(in an under tone)—"couldn't you get 'em to go?"

"Who?" inquired Seager, again following the glance the Colonel cast towards the same part of the room.

"Who!" cried Bagot; "why, that tea-party there. They've been drinking tea the whole morning—two women and a man."

"By Jove, he's mad," thought Seager to himself—"mad as a March hare."

"I've asked 'em as civilly as I could to go away," said Bagot, "but they don't mind that. It's very curious, too, where they got the tea, for I don't take much of it. Fancy them coming to me for tea, eh?" said Bagot. "Absurd, you know."

"Why, 'tis rather a good joke," said Seager, affecting to laugh, but in great consternation. Since reading the accident to the poor little Baronet in the papers, he had counted on Bagot as the source from whence all the funds required for the conduct of the coming trial (without mentioning other more immediate wants) were to be supplied. And here was the Colonel evidently out of his mind—unfit, perhaps, to transact even so simple a business as drawing money.

"Have you got much money in the house, Lee?" asked Seager presently.

"Money," said Bagot, who seemed to answer some questions rationally enough; "no, I don't think I have; I'm going to draw some as soon as I've seen my lawyer."

"Just so," said Seager, "and the sooner the better. Where's your check-book? Just sign your name, and I'll fill it up. We must have some funds to carry on the war. The trial comes on the beginning of next month, and there's a great deal to be done beforehand."

"Ah, that cursed trial!" said the Colonel, grinding his teeth; "but I've been thinking it over, Seager, and it's my belief that, if we bribe the Crown lawyers high enough, we may get 'em to lay the indictment for *manslaughter*."

"Manslaughter!" repeated Seager to himself, as he took the check-book from Bagot's writing-desk. "Oh, by Jove, he's stark staring! Now, old fellow," he continued, coming to the bedside with the inkstand and check-book, "here you are. Just take the pen and write your name here. I'll fill it up afterwards."

Bagot took the pen, and tried to write his name as Seager directed; but his hand shook so that he could not, and after an attempt or two, he threw the pen from him.

"Come, try once more, and I'll guide your hand," said Seager. But Bagot refused so testily that he did not press him.

"Do you know," said Seager presently, puzzled at Bagot's extraordinary demeanour, "I don't think you're half awake yet, Lee. You've been dreaming, haven't you?"

"Not a bit," said Bagot; "I didn't sleep a wink all night."

"I wonder if that's true?" thought Seager. "You don't see the tea-party now, do you?"

Bagot, as if suddenly recollecting them, looked quickly towards the corner where he had fancied them seated. "No," said he, with a kind of doubtful pleasure; "they're gone—gone, by Jove!" Then, raising himself on his elbow, he cast a searching

glance all round the room, and at last behind his bed, when he started, and, falling back aghast on his pillow, muttered, "There they are behind the curtains, drinking tea as hard as ever, *and they've got a little boy with 'em now.*"

"Ah," said Seager, humouring him, "what's the boy like?"

"I could only see his back," answered Bagot, in a whisper, "but I wouldn't look again for the world" (shuddering, and turning his face away).

Seager now went to the door, and calling Wilson, desired him to fetch a physician who lived in the street, to see his master.

The physician, a brisk man, of few years, considering his eminence, and who piqued himself on suiting his tone to that of his patients and their friends, soon arrived. He came in jauntily, asked Bagot how he was, heard all about the intrusive tea-party, felt his pulse, looked at him attentively, and then took Seager aside.

"The Colonel, now, isn't the most abstemious man in the world, is he?" he inquired, with a jocular air.

"No, by Gad," said Mr Seager; "he's a pretty hard liver."

"Drinks pretty freely, eh? Wine?—brandy?"

"More than I should like to," replied Seager.
"I've often told him he'd have to pull up some day."

"Ah, yes, he'll have to"—said the other, nodding.

"He's got delirium tremens."

"Has he, by Jove!" exclaimed Seager—adding, with an oath, "what a fool I was, that it never occurred to me, knowing him as I do."

"The attack's just beginning now, and promises to be violent," said the doctor.

"What—you think 'twill go hard with him, eh?"

The physician said, "Perhaps it might; 'twas impossible to say; however," he added, "you won't be long in suspense—a few days will settle the matter."

"Come, that's a comfort," said Seager, remembering how important it was that Bagot should be able to exert himself before the trial. "Poor devil," he added, "what a pity—just come into a fine property!"

"Well, well, we'll try to keep him in possession," said the doctor. "I'll leave a prescription, and look in again shortly."

"By the by," said Seager, detaining him, "people who've got this complaint sometimes talk confounded stuff, don't they?" The doctor said they did.

"And let out secrets about their own affairs, and other people's?"

"Possibly they might," the doctor said—"their delusions were various, and often mixed strangely with truth. I've heard patients," he added, "in this

state talk about private matters, and therefore it may be as well to let no strangers come about him, if you can avoid it."

Seager thought the advice good, and assured the doctor that he would look after him himself. Accordingly, he sent to his own lodgings for a supply of necessaries, and established himself as Bagot's attendant.

In this capacity Mr Seager's energy and vigilant habits enabled him to act with great effect ; in fact, if he had been the poor Colonel's warmly-attached brother, he could not have taken better care of him. He administered his medicine, which there was no difficulty in getting him to take, as it consisted principally of large doses of brandy : he held him down, with Wilson's assistance, in his violent fits, and humoured the strange hallucinations which now began to crowd upon him thick and fast.

Some of these Mr Seager found rather diverting, especially an attendant imp which Bagot conceived was perpetually hovering about the bed, and in whose motions he took vast interest.

"Take care," said Bagot, starting up in bed on one occasion as Seager approached him ; "mind, mind ! you'll tread on him."

"Tread on what ?" said Seager, looking down, deceived by the earnestness of the appeal.

"Why the little devil—poor little fellow, don't hurt him. You've no idea how lively he is. I wouldn't have him injured," added Bagot tenderly, "on any account."

"Certainly not," said Seager; "not while he behaves himself. What's he like, eh?"

"He's about the size," returned Bagot, "of a printer's devil, or perhaps a little smaller; and, considering his inches, he's uncommonly active. He was half-way up the bedpost this morning at one spring."

All this nonsense, delivered with perfect earnestness and gravity, contrasted so oddly with the Colonel's red nose and bristly unshaven face, that it greatly amused Mr Seager, and helped him to pass the time. By-and-by, however, both the tea-party and the imp disappeared, and their place was taken by spectres of more formidable stamp. In particular, there was a demon disguised as a bailiff in top-boots, who was come, as Bagot firmly believed, to take his soul in execution, he having unfortunately lost it at chicken-hazard to the enemy of mankind, which latter personage he paid Mr Seager the compliment of taking him for.

It was now that Seager began to appreciate the soundness of the doctor's advice with respect to excluding strangers from the hearing of Bagot's delusions.

He began to talk, sometimes pertinently, sometimes wildly, of the approaching trial, generally ending in absurd ravings ; sometimes charging Seager with dreadful crimes, sometimes imagining himself the culprit. On the third day of his attack, Seager remarked that a showman figured largely in his discourse, and, finding the patient in a tractable mood, he questioned him as to who this showman might be.

"I know," said the Colonel, still taking Mr Seager for the distinguished personage aforesaid—"I know it's of no use to try to keep anything a secret from *you*. But suppose now I tell you all about Holmes, will you let me off what—what I lost, you know?"

"What was that?" asked Seager, forgetting the imaginary forfeit.

"Why the—the soul," said Bagot. "It's of no use to you, you know."

"Oh, ah, I'd forgotten that," said Seager. "Pray, don't mention it; 't isn't of the least consequence. Yes, we'll cry quits about that."

Then, to his hearer's surprise, Bagot, apparently satisfied with the conditions, related all the particulars of his nocturnal interview with Mr Holmes, comprising what had passed between them inside the caravan.

Seager listened in breathless astonishment. The delusion, if delusion there was in this instance, was

the most plausible and coherent of any that had yet haunted Bagot. It had touched, too, on some previous suspicions in Seager's own mind, and he resolved, if Bagot recovered, to sound him on the subject.

Meantime he tried to lead him to talk more freely on the subject. But Bagot now began to wander, talked all kinds of nonsense, and ended, as usual, in violent ravings.

All this time the demon in top-boots and his brethren were in constant attendance. Never for a moment was Bagot free from the horror of their presence ; and if all the frightful spectres of romance and superstition had been actually crowded round his bed, the poor Colonel could not have suffered more than from the horrible phantasms that his imagination summoned to attend him.

It was beginning to be doubtful if he could hold out much longer under the disease ; but on the third night he fell asleep, and woke the next morning in his right mind.

"Ah, he's pulled through this time," said the doctor, when he saw him. "All right, now ; but he mustn't resume his hard drinking, or he'll have another attack."

"I'll look after him myself," said Mr Seager. "I'll lock up the brandy bottle, and put him on short allowance."

"Well, he ought to be very grateful to you, I'm sure," said the doctor, "for all your attention. Really, I never saw greater kindness, even among near relations." And the doctor having been paid, departed, perfectly convinced that Mr Seager was one of the best fellows that ever breathed, and the sort of person to make any sacrifice to serve his friends.

"Now I'll tell you what it is, Lee," said Seager, when Bagot was on his legs again, and manifested a desire for his customary drams. "You mustn't go on in your old way yet awhile. If you do, you'll go to the devil in no time."

"Never you mind, sir," said Bagot with dignity. "I presume I'm the best judge of what's good for me."

"You never made a greater mistake," returned Mr Seager. "Just go and look in the glass, and see what your judgment of what's good for you has brought you to, you unfortunate old beggar. You look like a cocktail screw after the third heat, all puffing and trembling. I'll lay you a five-pound note you don't look me straight in the face for a minute together. Here's a sovereign, now—well, I'll put it between your lips, and if you can hold it there for fifty seconds, you shall have it, and if not, you shall give me one. What d'ye say to that?"

"Sir," said Bagot, with his lips trembling, and his eyes rolling more than ever at these delicate allusions to his infirmities—"sir, you are disagreeably personal."

"Personal!" sneered Mr Seager. "I wish you could hear the confounded rubbish you talked while in bed. I only wished I'd had a short-hand writer to take it down—all about the bailiffs, and devils, and so forth. And the showman, too—one Holmes. He struck me as a real character; and if all you said was true, you must have had some queer dealings together."

As he spoke he fixed his green eye on Bagot, who started, cast one nervous glance at him, and then, in great agitation, rose and walked to the window, where Seager saw him wipe his forehead with his handkerchief.

Presently he looked stealthily over his shoulder, and, perceiving that Seager still eyed him, he affected to laugh. "Cursed nonsense I must have talked, I daresay," said he huskily. "Oh, cursed, you know, ha, ha."

"But that about the showman Holmes didn't sound so absurd as the rest," said Seager. "It struck me as more like some real circumstances you were recollecting. Come, suppose you tell me all about it sensibly, now."

"No more of this, sir," said Bagot, waving the handkerchief he had been wiping his forehead with. "The subject is unpleasant. No man, I presume, likes to be reminded that he has been talking like a fool. We won't resume the subject now, or at any other time, if you please."

"Ah," said Seager to himself, on observing Bagot's agitation, "I was right—there was some truth in that. I must consider how to turn it to account."

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN his new circumstances Bagot was, of course, a very different personage from the Colonel Lee known to tradesmen and money-lenders of old. There was no talk now of arresting him for small debts, no hesitation in complying with his orders. The Jews, bill-brokers, and other accommodating persons who had lately been open-mouthed against him, now offered him unlimited credit, of which he did not fail to avail himself. His creditor, Mr Dubbley, seeing the very different position the Colonel would now occupy at the Heronry, and alive to the impolicy of offending so important a neighbour, stopt all proceedings against him, and, with the most abject apologies and assurances of regard, entreated him to take his own leisure for the payment of the debt. Apparently satisfied with these advantages, the Colonel showed no eagerness to take upon him either the dignity or the emoluments that had now devolved on him in the succession of inheritance.

The first lawyers in the kingdom were retained for him and Seager. A considerable sum was placed at the disposal of the latter, who was to employ it either in bribing that very important witness, Jim the groom, who had charge of Goshawk, to perjure himself, or in getting him to abscond. As he proved tractable, however, and agreed, for a sum which he named, to swear anything that the gentlemen might wish, it was resolved to produce him ; and Seager was very sanguine of a favourable result.

In the mean time Bagot, anxious and gloomy, kept almost entirely in his lodgings, and seldom spoke to anybody except on business. He did not know what reports might be abroad about the coming trial ; he did not know how his associates would look upon him ; and he feared at present to put the matter to proof by going among them. This line of conduct Seager thought highly impolitic, and told him so. "Put a good face on the matter," he said. "Go down to the club—play billiards—go to the opera. If you go sneaking about with a hangdog face, as if you didn't dare show yourself, people will bring you in guilty before the trial, and the legal acquittal will hardly serve to set you right again."

So Bagot suffered himself to be persuaded, and went down to his club. Here he had been, in days of yore, a prominent character, and had enjoyed an

extensive popularity among the members. He formed a sort of connecting link between the fogies and the youngsters ; his experience allying him with the one class, his tastes and habits with the other. Here he might formerly often have been seen entertaining a knot of immoral old gentlemen with jokes improper for publication, or the centre of an admiring circle of fledglings of the sporting world, who revered him as an old bird of great experience and sagacity.

With doubtful and anxious feelings, he now revisited the scene of his former glory. Putting on as composed a face as possible, he went up-stairs and entered the library. There were several people in it whom he knew. One well-known man-about-town, with whom the Colonel was rather intimate, was seated opposite the door reading a newspaper, and, as Bagot could have sworn, fixed his eye on him as he entered, but it was instantaneously dropt on the paper. Another member—an old gentleman who was strongly suspected of a happy knack of turning up honours at critical movements of the game of whist—looked round at his entrance, and the Colonel advanced to greet him, in perfect confidence that he, at any rate, was not a likely person to cast the first stone at him ; but Bagot was mistaken. The old gentleman shifted his chair so as to place his back towards Bagot, with a loud snort of virtuous indigna-

tion, and, leaning forward, whispered to a neighbour some hurried words, of which Bagot could distinguish—"Deuced bad taste!—don't you think so?"

Crimson with rage and shame, Bagot bent down over a newspaper to recover himself, and fumbled with trembling hands at his eye-glasses. He heard a step behind him presently, but he dared not look up.

"Lee, my boy, how are you?" said a stout hearty man about fifty, slapping the Colonel on the shoulder. "I've just come back from a tour, and the first thing I saw in the paper was about you—about your"—the stout gentleman stopt to sneeze, which he did four times, with terrible convulsions of face and figure, during which Bagot was in horrible suspense, while every ear in the room was pricked up—"about your good fortune," said the stout gentleman, after he had blown and wiped his sonorous nose as carefully as if it were some delicate musical instrument that he was going to put by in its case. "I congratulate you with all my heart. Fine property, I'm told. Just wait while I ring the bell, and we'll have a chat together."

He went to the bell and rung it; but, on his way back to Bagot, he was stopped by a friend who had entered the library with him, and who now drew him aside. Bagot stole a glance over his paper at them. He felt they were talking about him. He heard his

stout friend say—"God bless me, who would have thought it!" and he perceived that, instead of rejoicing him, according to promise, he took a chair at the farther end of the room.

Bagot still kept his own seat a little while, but he could not long endure his position. He fancied every one was looking at him, though, when, with this impression strong on him, he glared defiance around, every eye was averted. He wished—he only wished—that some one would offer him some gross tangible insult, that he might relieve himself by an outburst—that he might hurl his scorn and defiance at them and the whole world.

No one, however, seemed likely to oblige him with an opportunity of this kind, and, after a minute or two, Bagot rose, and, with as much composure as he could command, quitted the room and the house. As he walked—in no happy frame of mind with himself, with the world, or with Seager, whose advice had entailed upon him this mortification—towards his lodgings along one of the small streets near St James's, he saw some one wave his hand to him, in a friendly manner, from the opposite side of the way. Bagot was too short-sighted to recognise this acquaintance; but, seeing him prepare to cross the road to him, and reflecting that he could not afford to drop any acquaintances just then,

when all seemed deserting him, he stopped to see who it was.

Mr Jack Sharpe, the person who now drew near, had been intended for the Church, but happening to be fast in everything except in his progress in the different branches of university learning, in which he was particularly slow, he never arrived at the dignity of orders. He had formerly moved in the same circle as Bagot, but had lost his footing there, in consequence of strong suspicions of dishonourable conduct on the turf. These seemed the more likely to be just, as he had never sought to rebut the charge against him ; and it was rumoured that, since the occurrence, he had allied himself—taking, at the same time, no great precautions for secrecy—with a certain swindling confederacy. Therefore Bagot had, when last in town, in all the might and majesty of conscious integrity, avoided Mr Jack Sharpe, sternly repelled all his attempts to renew their acquaintance, and returned his greetings, when they chanced to meet, with the most chilling and formal bows. Sharpe appeared to think that late circumstances had bridged over the gulf between them, for he not only saluted Bagot with unwonted familiarity, but took his hand. The Colonel disengaged it, and, intrenching himself behind his dignity, endeavoured to pass on. Jack Sharpe, nothing daunted, walked cheerfully beside him.

"Well, Colonel, how goes the trial?" asked Mr Sharpe, who had managed, notwithstanding his downfall, to preserve the appearance and manners of a gentleman. "You'll get a verdict, I hope."

The Colonel inclined his head stiffly.

"Well, I hope so," said Jack Sharpe. "It was a deuced clever thing, from what I hear of it, and deserves success; and my opinion of the cleverness of the thing will be exactly the same, whether you and Seager get an acquittal or not." And Mr Sharpe looked as if he expected to find Bagot highly gratified by his approbation.

"Do you presume, for a moment, to insinuate a doubt of my innocence of the charge?" asked Bagot sternly.

"Oh, certainly not," returned Jack Sharpe, with a laugh. "Quite right to carry it high, Colonel. Nothing like putting a good face on it."

"Sir," said Bagot, increasing his pace, "your remarks are offensive."

"I didn't mean them to be so," answered the other. "But you're quite right to carry it off this way. You've come into a good property, I hear, and that will keep you fair with the world, however this trial, or a dozen other such, might go. Some people have the devil's own luck. Yes, Colonel, you'll pull through it—you'll never fall among thieves. It's

only the *poor* devils," added Jack Sharpe bitterly, "that get pitched into and kicked into outer darkness."

Bagot was perfectly livid. By this time they had reached a corner of the street, and, stopping short, the Colonel said—

"Oblige me by saying which way your road lies."

"Well, well, good morning, Colonel. I'm not offended, for, I daresay, I should do the same myself in your place. Politic, Colonel, politic! I wish you good luck and good morning." And Mr Jack Sharpe took himself off.

This encounter grated on Bagot's feelings more than any other incident that had occurred to him. To be hailed familiarly as a comrade by a swindler—to be prejudged as one who had forfeited his position in society, and was to retain it only on new and accidental grounds—this sunk deep, and shook that confidence of success which he had hitherto never permitted himself to question.

Just afterwards he met Seager, who came gaily up to ask him how he had got on at the club. Bagot told him something of the unpleasant treatment he had met with, and the disgust and annoyance it had caused him to feel. Seager grinned.

"You're not hard enough, Lee—you think too much of these things. Now, I'm as hard as a nail.

I meet with exactly the same treatment as you do, but what do I care for it? It doesn't hurt me—they can't put *me* down," and Seager smiled at the thought of his own superiority. "What would you do, I wonder, if a thing which just now happened to me were to happen to you? I was looking on at a billiard match, and Crossley (you know Crossley?) who had been, like the rest of 'em, deuced distant and cool to me, offered to bet on the game. I took him up—he declined. 'Oh, you back out, do you?' says I. 'Not at all,' says Crossley; 'but I don't bet with everybody.' Now, what would you have done?"

"I should have desired him to apologise instantly," said the Colonel.

"He'd have refused."

"I'd have kicked him," said the Colonel.

"'Twould have caused a row, and we're quite conspicuous enough already," said Seager. "No; I turned coolly to him, and says I, 'Very good; as we're going to close our accounts, I'll thank you for that ten-pound note I won from you on the Phœbe match.' Crossley, you know, is poor and proud, and he looked cursedly disgusted and cut up at this exposure of his shortcomings. I'll bet, he wishes he'd been civil now. You must take these things coolly.

Never mind how they look at you : go back to the club, now, and brave it out—show 'em you don't care for 'em."

"No," muttered Bagot, "I'd die first. I'll go out no more till 'tis over."

In this resolution he shut himself up in his lodgings, only going out in the dusk to walk in such thoroughfares as were not likely to be frequented by any of his acquaintances. Never had a week passed so dismally with him as this. His nerves were yet unstrung by his late attack, and his anxiety was augmented as the day of the trial approached, until he wondered how he could endure it. In spite of his efforts, his thoughts were impelled into tracks the most repugnant to him. The remembrance of his reception by the members of his club haunted him incessantly, though it was what most of all he wished to forget ; for Bagot, being, as we have seen him, a weak-principled man of social habits, though he had found no difficulty in quieting his own conscience, was keenly alive to the horrors of disgrace.

He felt as he remembered to have often felt when a great race was approaching, which was to make or mar him—only the interest now was more painfully strong than ever before. There was an event of some sort in store—why could he not divine it ?—ah, if he were only as wise now as he would be this day

week, what anxiety would be saved him ! He only dared contemplate the possibility of one result—an acquittal. That would lift the weight from his breast and reopen life to him. But a conviction—that he dared not think of—for that contingency he made no provision.

During this week Harry Noble had come up from the Heronry on some business connected with the stable there, in which the Colonel had been interested ; and Bagot, conceiving he might be useful in matters in which he did not choose to trust his own servant Wilson, had desired him to remain in town for the present. This Seager was glad of, for he knew Harry was to be trusted, and he told him in a few words the nature of the predicament the Colonel was in.

“ You must have an eye to him,” said Seager ; “ don’t let him drink much, if you can help it ; and if it should be necessary for him to make a trip to France for a time, you must go with him.”

“ I’ll go with him to the world’s end, Mr Seager,” said Harry. He was much attached to the Colonel, having known him since the time when Noble, as a boy, entered the Heronry stables ; and though he had then, like the other stable-boys, found Bagot very severe and exacting, yet, having once proved himself a careful and trustworthy servant and excel-

lent groom, the Colonel had honoured him since with a good deal of his confidence.

Harry had the more readily agreed to this, since, when leaving the Heronry, he had parted in great wrath from Miss Fillett, who had found time in the midst of her religious zeal to harrow up Noble's soul with fresh jealousies, and to flirt demurely, but effectually, with many brethren who frequented the same chapel.

The day before the trial Seager came, and Bagot prevailed on him to stay and dine, and play *écarte*. Seager was sanguine of the result of the trial, which was to commence on the morrow, in the Court of Queen's Bench—spoke in assured terms of the excellence of their case, their counsel, and their witnesses; and telling him to keep up his spirits, wished him good-night, promising to bring him back the earliest intelligence of how the day had gone.

The Colonel's eagerness for, and terror of, the result, had now worked him into a state of agitation little short of frenzy. The trial was expected to last two days, but the first would probably show him how the case was likely to terminate. Both Bagot and Seager preferred forfeiting their recognisances to surrendering to take their trial, which would have shut out all hope of escape in the event of an adverse verdict.

Finding it impossible to sit still while in this state, the Colonel started for a long walk, resolving to return at the hour at which Seager might be expected. Arriving a few minutes later than he intended, he went up-stairs to his sitting-room, but started back on seeing a person whom he did not recognise there. His first impression was, that it was a man come to arrest him.

His visitor, on seeing his consternation, gave a loud laugh. It was Mr Seager.

"Gad, Lee," said that worthy, "*it must* be well done, if it takes you in. I was in court all day, and sat next a couple of our set, but they hadn't an idea who I was."

Mr Seager was certainly well disguised, and it was no wonder the Colonel had not recognised him. Low on his forehead came a black wig, and whiskers of the same met under his chin. He had a mustache also ; his coat was blue, his waistcoat gorgeous, with two or three chains, evidently plated, meandering over it, and his trousers were of a large and brilliant check. In his elaborate shirt-front appeared several studs, like little watches, and his neck was enveloped in a black satin stock with gold flowers and a great pin.

"What d'ye think, Lee—don't I look the nobby Israelite, eh?"

Bagot shortly admitted the excellence of his disguise, and then asked, "What news?—is it over?"

"Only the prosecution—that's finished," returned the metamorphosed Seager.

"Well," said Bagot breathlessly, "and how—how did it go?"

"Sit down," said Seager; "give me a cigar, and I'll tell you all about it."

Nothing could be more strongly contrasted than the anxiety of Bagot with the composure of Seager. No one would have imagined them to be both equally concerned in the proceedings that the latter now proceeded to relate; while Bagot glared at him, gnawing his nails and breathing hard.

"The court," said Seager, throwing himself back in the chair after he had lit his cigar, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, and his feet stretched to the fire—"the court was crowded. Sloperton's counsel opened the ball by giving a sketch of the whole affair—little personal histories of you and me and Sloperton, the sort of things that might be prefixed to our poetical works after we're dead; you know the style of thing, Lee,—birth, parentage, breeding, so forth. Then came out Sloperton's meeting with us at the Bush at Doddington—the adjournment to Oates's room—the broiled bones, cards, and betting, and the terms of the wager with Sloperton.

"Our friend Sloper was the first witness, and had got himself up a most awful swell, as you may suppose, on such a grand occasion, and there wasn't a young lady in court who didn't sympathise with him. I could see by his way of giving evidence he was as vindictive as the devil. Our fellows went at him, but they didn't damage his evidence much. He told about the bet—how, by your advice, he had sent to me to offer to compromise it—and how he had perfectly depended all was fair till he heard the mare was lame. Oates followed, and corroborated the whole story. Then came one of the vets who attended the mare, and he swore, in his opinion, she'd got navicular disease. Then came a new actor" (Bagot listened more eagerly than ever), "one Mr Chick, who saw us return to the stable that morning we gave Goshawk the trial; and he swore the mare was lame then."

Bagot drew a long breath, and fell back in his chair.

"Against all this," Seager went on, "we've got to-morrow the evidence of Jim, who'll swear the mare never was lame while in his charge, and of the other vet, who'll swear she was and is sound. So cheer up, old boy; it may go all right yet. Never say die."

Seager paused, and looked at Bagot, who had

covered his face with his hands. Both were silent for a space.

"By the by," said Seager presently, in an indifferent tone, yet eyeing Bagot with a keenness that showed his interest in the question—"by the by, where's Lady Lee now?"

Bagot did not answer, and Seager repeated the question.

"What's Lady Lee to you, sir?" said Bagot, removing his hands from his face, the colour of which was very livid.

"O, nothing particular; but she might be something to you, you know, in case of the business going against us to-morrow. You said she had left the Heronry, didn't you?"

Bagot did not reply.

"It's no use blinking the matter," said Seager testily. "Things may go against us to-morrow, in which case I'm off—and so are you, I suppose. I've made all my arrangements; but I think we had better take different roads, and appoint a place to meet on the Continent. But I'm short of money for a long trip, and, of course, you'll accommodate me. We row in the same boat, you know. Come, what will you come down with?"

"Not a penny," said Bagot in a low thick voice.

"Eh! what?" said Seager, looking up at him.

"Not a penny," said Bagot, raising his voice. "You devil," he cried, starting from his chair, "don't you know you've ruined me?" and, seizing the astonished Seager by the throat, he shook him violently.

"You cursed old lunatic!" cried Seager, as soon as he had struggled himself free from Bagot's grasp. "You're mad, you old fool. Only raise a finger again, and I'll brain you with the poker. What d'ye mean, ha? We must talk about this, and you shall apologise, or give me satisfaction."

"What, an affair of *honour*, eh?" sneered Bagot between his ground teeth. "Between two *gentlemen*! That sounds better than convicted swindlers. Curse you," he added, in a hoarse whisper, "you've been my destruction."

"He's dangerous," thought Seager, as he looked at him. "Come, Lee," said he, "listen to reason; lend me a supply, and we'll say no more about this queer behaviour. I know you've been drinking."

"You have my answer, sir," said Bagot. "Not a penny, I repeat. I wish you may starve—rot in a jail."

Seager looked at him keenly for a minute. "He's been at the brandy bottle," he thought. "Well, let

him drink himself mad or dead, if he likes. But, no!—that won't do either—he may be useful yet. The old fool!” he muttered as he departed, “he doesn't know how far he has let me into his secrets. Well, he'll change his note, perhaps;” so saying, he left the room and the house.

CHAPTER XLV.

DISGUISED as before, Seager went to Westminster next day, to hear the conclusion of the trial. The court was, as on the previous day, crowded to excess, and Seager recognised a great number of his and Bagot's acquaintances among the spectators.

The counsel for the defendants made an able address to the jury. The prosecutor, he said, had tried to win Seager's money, as Seager had tried to win his ; and, nettled at finding he had made a rash bet, he now brought the action. The defendants were men of reputation, who had been engaged in many betting transactions before, and always without blemish or suspicion. There was no proof that the mare was unfit for the feat she had been backed to perform ; and, if she had attempted it, she could have done it with ease.

After calling several witnesses to speak to minor points, the other veterinary surgeon who had attended

the mare was put in the box. He swore the mare's lameness was trifling and temporary ; that he had seen her trot, and believed her certain to win such a match as the one in question ; and that he had not detected in her any trace of navicular disease.

This witness having sustained a severe cross-examination unshaken, Mr Seager began to breathe more freely. The last witness was Jim the groom. Jim, though very compliant in respect of any evidence he might be required to give, had obstinately insisted on payment beforehand. It was to no purpose Seager had promised him the money the instant he should come out of court ; the cautious Jim was inflexible till the stipulated sum was put in his hands.

Seager watched him as he was being sworn with the greatest attention ; but Jim's was not an expressive countenance, and nothing was to be read there. But Mr Seager detected treachery in his manner the moment the examination began. Without attempting to repeat the lesson he had been taught, he prevaricated so much that the counsel for the defendants, finding he was more likely to damage than to assist his clients, abruptly sat down. In the cross-examination he suffered (though with some appearance of unwillingness) the whole truth to be elicited ; admitted the mare's lameness—remembered the Colonel

and his master trying her, and finding her lame (an incident he had been especially desired to erase from his memory)—and also remembered to have heard them talk about “navicular.” He also recollected that Seager cautioned him to keep the circumstance very quiet.

Seager sat grinding his teeth with rage. He had forgotten the incident of the horse-whipping which he had administered to Jim, though the latter had not, and was therefore at a loss to account for his treachery. Jim’s revenge happening to coincide with his duty, he had no sooner pocketed the reward for his intended perjury, than he resolved to pursue the paths of rectitude, and to speak the truth.

Just at this time Seager caught sight of one he knew standing very near him, and listening as eagerly as himself. This was Harry Noble, who had been there also on the previous day, and who, firmly convinced that his master was wrongfully accused, had heard the evidence of the groom Jim with high indignation, and was now burning to defy that perjured slanderer to abide the ordeal of single combat. Seager, writing a few words on a slip of paper, made his way up to Harry, and pulled his sleeve. Noble turned round and stared at him, without any sign of recognition.

“Look another way,” said Seager, “and listen.

'Tis me—and I want you to run with this note to the Colonel."

"What! are you Mr Sea——?" began Harry; but Seager squeezed his arm.

"Hush!" he said. "I don't want to be known; and don't mention to anybody but the Colonel that you've seen me. Take this note to him; he'll start for France as soon as he gets it, and you must get him away with all the speed you can. Don't delay a minute."

Noble nodded and quitted the court. He got a cab, and went with all speed to Bagot's lodgings, and, telling the cabman to wait, immediately ran upstairs with the note. The Colonel, who was pacing the room, snatched it eagerly, read it, and let it fall, sinking back into a chair quite collapsed. "It's all over," he muttered.

Noble stood near, looking at him in respectful silence for a minute or two. At length he ventured to say, "Shall I begin to pack up, sir? Mr Seager said we must be quick."

"Don't name him!" thundered Bagot, starting from his chair. "Curse him! I could tear him!"

"I'll never believe 'twas you as did the trick, sir," said Noble. "No more won't anybody else; though, as for Mr Seager, I couldn't say. Shall I begin to pack up, sir?" he repeated.

"Do what you please," returned his master in fierce abstraction.

Noble, thus empowered, entered the bedroom, and began to stow Bagot's clothes away in his portmantau. Presently he came to the door of the apartment, where the Colonel had again sunk down in his chair. Bagot was now face to face with the event he had so dreaded ; no subterfuge could keep it off any longer—no side look rid him of its presence. He would, in a few hours, be a convicted, as he was already a disgraced, man. The averted looks—the whispers—the cold stares of former friends, that had lately driven him almost mad, were now to be his for life. Life ! would he bear it ? It had no further hope, promise, or charm for him, and he was resolved to be rid of it and dishonour together.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Noble at length, seeing that Bagot took no notice of him. "Perhaps you'd wish to let my lady know where we're gone, sir ?"

Bagot started, and seemed to think for a minute. As soon as Noble, after delivering his suggestion, had vanished, the Colonel drew his chair to the table, and began to write, while Harry, in the next room, went on with the packing.

He finished his letter, directed and sealed it, and laid it down, muttering, "Thank God there's one act of justice done." Then he went to a cupboard in the

apartment, filled a large glass of brandy, and drank it off. "Now," he muttered, "one moment's firmness! no delay! Leave that room," he called out to Noble, as he went towards the bedroom—"there's something I wish to pack up myself."

Noble accordingly came out. As he passed the Colonel, he noticed a wildness in his expression. Before entering the bedroom the Colonel turned and said, "Let that letter be sent to-day," pointing to the one he had just written, "and you can go down stairs for the present," he added.

Noble's suspicions were aroused. Having got as far as the door, he pretended to shut himself out, and came softly back. Listening for a moment, he heard Bagot open some sort of case that creaked. Presently he peeped in—Bagot was in the very act of fumbling, with trembling hands, at the lock of a pistol. He was just raising it towards his head when Noble, with a shout, rushed in and caught his arm.

"Don't ye, sir, don't ye, for God's sake!" he said, as Bagot turned his face with a bewildered stare towards him. "Give it to me, sir."

"Leave me, sir," said Bagot, still looking wildly at him—"leave me to wipe out my dishonour." He struggled for a moment to retain the pistol, but Noble wrested it from him, took off the cap, and returned it to its case. The Colonel sunk down

moaning on the bed, and covered his face with his hands.

Noble hastily fastened the portmanteau and carpet-bag, and called to Wilson to help to take them down to the cab in which he had come, and which waited at the door.

"Now, sir," he whispered to Bagot, "don't take on so—we shall be safe to-night. You won't think of doing yourself a mischief, sir, will you? don't ye, sir!"

He took him gently by the arm. The poor Colonel, with his nerves all unstrung, rose mechanically, and stood like a child while Noble put on his hat and wiped his face, which was moist with sweat and tears; then he followed him down stairs unresistingly. Noble whispered to Wilson at the door, that he and the Colonel were going away for a time, and that there was a letter on the table to be sent that night to the post. Then he put the Colonel and the luggage into the cab, mounted himself to the box, and they drove off, Harry frequently turning to look at his master through the front glass.

Meantime Seager sat hearing the close of the defence. The judge summed up, leaving it to the jury to say whether the defendants knew of the mare's unfitness to perform her engagement at the

time they persuaded the plaintiff to pay a sum in compromise. The jury, after a short deliberation, found them both guilty of fraud and conspiracy.

There was some technical objection put in by the defendants' counsel ; but this being overruled, the judge proceeded to pass sentence. He was grieved to find men of the defendants' position in society in such a discreditable situation. No one who had heard the evidence could doubt they had conspired to defraud the prosecutor of his money. He did not know whether he was justified in refraining from inflicting the highest punishment allotted to their offence, but, perhaps, the ends of justice might be answered by the lesser penalty. The sentence was, that the defendants should be imprisoned for two years.

Seager, seeing how the case was latterly going, was quite prepared for this. Just waiting to hear the close of the judge's address, he got out of court with all possible speed.

He went to his lodgings, changed his dress, and hurried to Bagot's. There he met Wilson with a letter in his hand, which he was about to take to the post. Seager glanced at the direction, and then averting his eye, "That's for Lady Lee," he said—"from the Colonel, is it not?" Wilson said it was.

"Ah," said Seager, "I just met him, and he asked me to call for it—he wants to add something he forgot, before 'tis posted. Give it me."

Wilson, supposing it was all right, gave it to him. Mr Seager, chuckling over the dexterity with which he had obtained the letter, and thus more than accomplished the design of his visit to Bagot's lodgings, which was to get Lady Lee's address, drove off to his own lodgings, reassumed his disguise, and went straight to the station.

Entering the railway office, he shrunk aside into a corner till the train should be ready to start—he wished to leave as few traces as possible behind him. He was quite unencumbered with baggage, having taken the precaution to send that on to Dover, to await him there under a feigned name. As he stood aside in the shade a man passed and looked narrowly at him. Seager thought he recognised his face: again he passed, and Seager this time knew him for a police sergeant in plain clothes. He was rather alarmed, yet he was a little reassured by considering that his disguise was a safe one. But he reflected that it might have caused him to be taken for some other culprit, and it would be as awkward to be arrested as the wrong man, as in his own character.

The last moment before the starting of the train was at hand, and Seager, as the police sergeant

turned upon his walk, darted stealthily to the check-taker's box and demanded a ticket, not for Frewenham, but for the station beyond it—for his habitual craft did not fail him. Having secured it, he hastened on to the platform and took his place.

At the moment he took his ticket, the sergeant, missing him, turned and saw him. Instantly he went to the box and asked where that last gentleman took his ticket for, and, on being told, took one for the same place. The bell had rung, and he hastened out, but he was too late. The train was already in motion; the last object he caught sight of was Seager's head thrust out of one of the carriages; and the baffled policeman turned back to wait for the next train.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FANE had spent some time in diligent pursuit of Onslow ; at first with no great promise of success, but latterly with some certainty of being upon his track. Just, however, as his hopes of securing him were strongest, he had received a letter which had been following him for some time from town to town, summoning him to attend the sick-bed of his uncle, who had been attacked with sudden and dangerous illness.

Of course he set off at once, as in duty bound ; but he was surprised and ashamed, knowing the obligations he lay under to his relative, to notice how little anxiety and pain the news occasioned him. Fane was very honest in analysing his own emotions, and on the present occasion laid more blame to the account of his own nature, which he accused of unsympathising callousness, than it by any means deserved. He would have done as much to serve a

friend, and was capable of as warm attachment as most people, but his feelings required a congenial nature to call them forth. He was not one of those who wear their hearts on their sleeve for any daw to peck at, and had none of that incontinence of affability which insures a man so many acquaintances and so few friends. Had he been Lear's eldest son, he would, to a certainty, have been disinherited, along with Cordelia, in favour of those gay deceivers, Goneril and Regan.

Now, Mr Levitt his uncle, though naturally amiable, was an undemonstrative character, full of good impulses which terribly embarrassed him. He would read a poem or romance with the keenest enjoyment, yet with affected contempt, turning up his nose and screwing down the corners of his mouth, while his eyes were watering and his heart beating. He would offer two fingers to a parting friend, nod good-by to him slightly, and turn away, feeling as if a shadow had come upon his world. He had been used to write to his nephews in the spirit of a Roman or Spartan uncle, giving them stern advice, and sending them the most liberal remittances, in the most ungracious manner—throwing checks at their heads, as it were—while all the time he was yearning for their presence. In fact, he was so ashamed of his bes points, and so anxious to conceal them, that the

rigid mask wherewith he hid his virtues had become habitual, and he was a very sheep in wolf's clothing.

Those, however, who had known him long, rated him at his true value. Fane found the household in great grief. Miss Betsey, an ancient housekeeper, distinguished principally by strong fidelity to the family interests, a passion for gin-and-water, and a most extraordinary cap, wrung her hands with great deccrum ; and Mr Payne the banker, Orelia's father, at the first news of his old friend's illness, had left a great money transaction unfinished to rush to his bedside, where Fane found him on his arrival. Indeed, it was from him he had received intelligence of his uncle's illness.

Mr Payne's temperament had suffered foul wrong when they made him a banker. He had naturally an intense dislike to matters of calculation, his bent being towards *belles lettres*, foreign travel, and the like pleasant paths. Somehow or other he had got rich, and flourished in spite of his want of talent for money-making. His worldly pursuits, perhaps, made his tastes keener, for he fell upon all manner of light reading with wonderful zest after a busy day at the bank. As for his taste for travelling, it was whispered among his acquaintances that its development was not so much owing to an erratic and inquiring spirit, as to the fact that in the second Mrs

Payne he had caught a Tartar, and availed himself of any plausible excuse to escape from her domestic tyranny. Orelia, coming home from school one vacation, and finding her stepmother in full exercise of authority, not only, as a matter of course, rebelled herself, but tried to stir up her father to join in the mutiny. Finding him averse to open war, she proclaimed her intention forthwith of quitting the paternal mansion, and living in the house which had become hers by the death of her godmother, as before related ; and Mr Payne, coming down on Saturdays after the bank was closed, would spend one-half of his weekly visit in lamenting the ill-temper of his spouse, and the other in his favourite studies.

Fane found his uncle slowly recovering from the effects of the attack which had prostrated him, and by no means secure from a relapse. Mr Levitt caught the sound of his step on the stair, and recognised it ; and Mr Payne, seated by the bedside, saw the invalid glance eagerly at the door. Nevertheless, he received his nephew almost coldly, though the latter testified warm interest in his state.

"You've been some time finding me out, Durham," said his uncle, after shortly answering his inquiries. "I'm afraid you've been summoned to this uninteresting scene from some more agreeable pursuit."

"It was an important one, at any rate, sir," re-

turned Fane; "yet even that did not prevent me hastening hither the moment Mr Payne's letter reached me. I only got it this morning."

"An important one, hey, Durham!" said Mr Levitt, with the cynical air under which he was accustomed to veil his interest in his nephew's proceedings. "We may judge of its importance, Payne, by his hurrying away from it to look after the ailments of a stupid old fellow like me. Some nonsense, I'll be bound."

Mr Payne, a bald benevolent man of fifty, in spectacles, came round the bed to shake Fane's hand.

"Without the pleasure of knowing the Captain, I'll answer for his holding you in due consideration," said Mr Payne. "And your uncle knows that, too; he's only joking," he said to Fane.

"Well, but the important business, Durham?" said the invalid, as Fane seated himself beside his pillow.

Fane, remembering that his cousin's was a prohibited name, and fearing the effect it might produce, attempted to laugh off the inquiry.

"Love!" said Mr Levitt, with another cynical glance at Mr Payne, who had resumed his station at the other side of the bed. "A charmer, for fifty pounds; why, I grow quite curious—don't you, Payne? It's exactly what you suggested as the cause

of his delay. Come, let's hear about her—begin with the eyes—that's the rule, isn't it?"

"Wrong, sir; quite wrong," said Fane, with another disclaiming laugh.

"Poor, bashful fellow!" persisted his uncle. "But we won't spare his blushes, Payne. And how far did you pursue the nymph, Durham?—and why did she fly you? Is she at length propitious? I hope so!—you know my wishes."

"There's no lady in the case, sir, I assure you," said Fane earnestly.

"Ah! it's always the way with your sensitive lovers," pursued his questioner, addressing Mr Payne. "They're as shy of the subject which occupies their thoughts as if they didn't like it. Come, if you're afraid to speak out before my friend Payne (though I'm sure you needn't be—he's discretion itself), he'll go away, I daresay. What is she like? and when is it to be?"

"When is what to be, sir?" asked Fane, trying to humour the old gentleman, but getting impatient, nevertheless.

"Why, the wedding, of course. Seriously, Durham, I'm all impatience. Your last letter seemed to point at something of the kind; and it was written long enough ago to have settled half-a-dozen love affairs since. I'm more earnest than ever on the

subject, now that my admonitions seem likely to be cut short ; and this matrimony question may affect the dispositions of my will, Durham."

"Consider it settled, then, I beg, sir," said Fane seriously. "I shall never marry."

"I shall be sorry to find you serious, Durham. A bachelor's life is but a dreary one. Just look at the difference between me and my friend Payne—he is rosy and happy, and, if he were lying here, he would have quite a family meeting assembled round him—while I should be alone, but for a nephew who has no great reason to care about me, and a friend whose good-nature brings him to see what may, perhaps, be the last of an old acquaintance. My opinions on the subject I've so often spoken to you of, haven't changed, you see, in the least—and perhaps I shall act upon them."

"As you please, sir," said Fane. "I speak my deliberate thought when I say I don't intend to marry."

Here Miss Betsey tapt at the door, to say that Mr Durham's supper was ready.

"Go down with him, Payne," said Mr Levitt. "I'll go on with this story here—a silly thing ; but sick people mustn't be too critical."

"An excellent novel !" exclaimed Mr Payne—"full of feeling."

"Ay, ay, well enough for that kind of trumpery," said the invalid, who was secretly burning to know how the hero and heroine were to be brought together through such a sea of difficulties; and his friend and his nephew, after making a few arrangements for his comfort, went down stairs together.

Fane dismissed the servant who waited at table. He wished to open what he intended to be, and what proved, a very interesting conversation.

"You're a very old friend of my uncle's, Mr Payne," he said. "I've so often heard him speak of you, that I seem almost familiar with you, though this is our first meeting."

"A school friendship," said Mr Payne; "and it has continued unbroken ever since."

"I will tell you," said Fane, "what the pursuit was I was really engaged in, and you will perceive I could not mention it to my uncle. The fact is, I believe I was on the point of discovering my cousin Langley."

Mr Payne dropt his knife and fork, and leant back in his chair. "You don't say so!" cried he. "Poor Langley—poor, poor Langley!"

Fane told the grounds he had for suspecting Langley and the ex-dragoon Onslow to be one and the same person.

"Following some faint traces," said Fane, "I

reached a town where, exposed for sale in a shop-window, I saw some drawings which I recognised for his. You know his gift that way."

"Ay, a first-rate draughtsman, poor fellow," said Mr Payne.

"He had sold these for a trifle, far below their value, and, as I found, had left the town only the day before. I therefore felt secure of him when your letter diverted me from the pursuit."

"Poor Langley!" repeated the sympathetic Mr Payne. "Such a clever fellow! Draw, sir! he had the making of half-a-dozen academicians in him—and ride!—but you've seen him ride, of course. And such an actor!—nothing like him off the London boards, and not many on them equal to him, in my opinion. And to end that way,—I don't know if I should like to see him again."

"You can perhaps enlighten me on a point I've long been curious about," said Fane. "I mean the real cause of my uncle's displeasure towards him—the extravagance attributed to Langley doesn't sufficiently account for it."

"No," said Mr Payne, "your uncle would have forgiven that readily enough. He pretended, as his way is, to be angrier at it than he was. But the real cause of estrangement was more serious.

"Your uncle finding, by his frequent applications

for money, that accounts which had reached him of Langley's gambling were but too true, at length replied to a request for a hundred pounds by enclosing a check to that amount, at the same time saying it was the last he must expect, and expressing his displeasure very harshly. The check was brought to our bank the next day, and it was not till after it had been cashed that it was suspected that the original amount, both in words and figures, had been altered. Four hundred pounds it now stood, and that sum had been paid on it. The 1 had easily been made into a 4, and the words altered to correspond—neatly enough, but not so like your uncle's as to pass with a close scrutiny. While we were examining it, your uncle came in, his anxiety on Langley's account having brought him to town. He took the check, looked at it, and then drew me aside. 'Tis forged,' said he ; 'mine was for a hundred : but not a word of this, Payne—let it pass as regular—tell the clerks 'tis all right.' This was a terrible blow to him. From that day to this we have heard nothing of Langley, nor does your uncle ever mention his name ; and no one but an intimate friend like me would guess how much he felt the dishonour."

"But Langley must have known 'twould be discovered immediately," said Fane, who listened with deep attention.

"Ay—but meantime his end was answered. The money was paid, and he doubtless calculated that your uncle would rather lose the sum than suffer the disgrace of exposure—and he was right."

"I can't believe him guilty," said Fane.

"He must have been severely tempted, poor boy," said Mr Payne—"always so open and upright; but there can, I'm afraid, be no doubt of his guilt. Consider, he has never showed his face since."

Fane thought for a minute or two. "No," he said—"no, not guilty, I hope and believe. No guilty man could have borne himself as he has done since. But there is now more reason than ever for resuming my search for him. Yes, yes—I must see and question him myself."

"Where do you believe him to be?" asked Mr Payne.

"I traced him to Frewenham in ——shire," answered Fane.

"Frewenham! God bless me! Why, my daughter's place, Larches, is close to that. I'm going down there in a day or two to see Orelia."

"Orelia!" exclaimed Fane; "then Miss Payne is your daughter."

"Oh, you have met, then, perhaps?" said Mr Payne, with interest; "where, and when?"

"At the Heronry," said Fane. "My troop is at

Doddington, the town nearest to where Miss Payne was staying."

"Oh, ho ! this is fortunate," said Mr Payne. "As soon as your uncle gets better, we will go down together to Frewenham. My friend Levitt," he resumed presently, "is, I see, much disappointed to find his surmises as to your matrimonial prospects incorrect. He had set his heart on their fulfilment ; and some expressions of admiration for some lady, in a late letter of yours, prepared him to expect something of the kind."

Fane coloured deeply. He remembered, indeed, that, writing to his uncle one evening, after a delightful afternoon passed with Lady Lee, he had suffered his admiration to overflow in expressions which, though they seemed to him slight compared with the merits of the subject, were yet, perhaps, sufficiently warm to warrant his uncle's inferences. It was some comfort to remember that he had not mentioned her name in this premature effusion.

"My uncle seems to have quite a monomania on the subject of my becoming a Benedict," he said presently, by way of breaking an awkward silence. "His doctrine would have seemed more consistent had he inculcated it by example as well as by precept. One doesn't often see a more determined bachelor."

"A love affair was the turning-point of your uncle's life," said Mr Payne. "He knows and feels that a different, and how much happier man he might have been, but for an early disappointment, and that makes him so desirous to see you comfortably established."

"Now, do you know," said Fane, "I can't, by any effort of imagination, fancy my uncle in love. His proposals, if he ever reached that point, must have been conveyed in an epigram."

"Your uncle is a good deal changed, in every respect, within the last few years, especially since that sad business of poor Langley," said Mr Payne; "but I scarcely recognise in him now my old (or rather, I should say, my young) friend Levitt. However, you may take my word for it, Captain Durham, that your uncle knew what it was, some five-and-twenty years ago, to be desperately in love. He seemed, too, to be progressing favourably with the object of his affections, till a gay young Captain in the Guards turned her head with his attentions—Captain, afterwards Colonel Lee."

"What! Bagot!" said Fane.

"Ah, you know him, then," said Mr Payne; "then you also know it was no great alleviation to your uncle's disappointment to find a man like Colonel

Lee preferred to him. Lee, it seems, had no serious intentions, and jilted her—and your uncle disdained to renew his suit.”

This account seemed to Fane to throw a good deal of light upon parts of his uncle's character which he had hitherto been unable to fathom.

“Yes,” resumed Mr Payne, “yes; your uncle is a great advocate for marriage, and certainly 'tis all very well in its way, though, perhaps,” he added dubiously, in an under tone, to himself—“perhaps it may be done once too often.”

Here Mr Payne left Durham while he went upstairs to visit his sick friend, and presently returned to say he had found him asleep, and thought he had better not be disturbed again. Shortly afterwards, finding Durham more disposed to ruminate over what he had heard than to converse, he bid him good night, and went to bed.

Fane's meditations were interrupted by Miss Betsey, who came in, not altogether free from an odour of gin-and-water, to express her gratification at seeing him well. Miss Betsey was a thin old lady, with an unsteady eye, and a nose streaked with little veins, like a schoolboy's marble. She wore on her head the most wonderful structure, in the shape of a cap, ever seen. It was a kind of tower of muslin, consisting of several stories ornamented with ribbons, and was

fastened under her chin with a broad band like a helmet. Her aged arms protruded through her sleeves, which were tight as far as the elbow, and sloped out wider till they terminated half-way to her wrist, where a pair of black mittens commenced.

"Your dear uncle's been bad, indeed," said Miss Betsey, taking a pinch of snuff. "I a'most thought we should have lost him, Mr Durham ; but he's better now, poor dear. But there's no knowing what might happen yet," said Miss Betsey, shaking her head ; "and I've had a thought concerning you, and him, and another, Mr Durham." Here Miss Betsey closed her snuff-box—which was round, black, and shining, and held about a quarter of a pound of princes' mixture—and, putting it in her ample pocket, laid the hand not occupied with snuff on Fane's shoulder with amiable frankness, which gin-and-water generates in old ladies. "Mr Durham, your dear uncle's never forgot your cousin, Master Langley—and 'twould be a grievous thing if he was to leave us" (a mild form of hinting at Mr Levitt's decease) "without forgiving him. Couldn't you put in a word, Mr Durham, for your dear cousin?"

"The very thing I intend, Miss Betsey," returned Fane, "as soon as it can be done effectually."

"Ah, Mr Durham," the old lady went on, waxing more confidential, "your dear uncle's fond of you, and

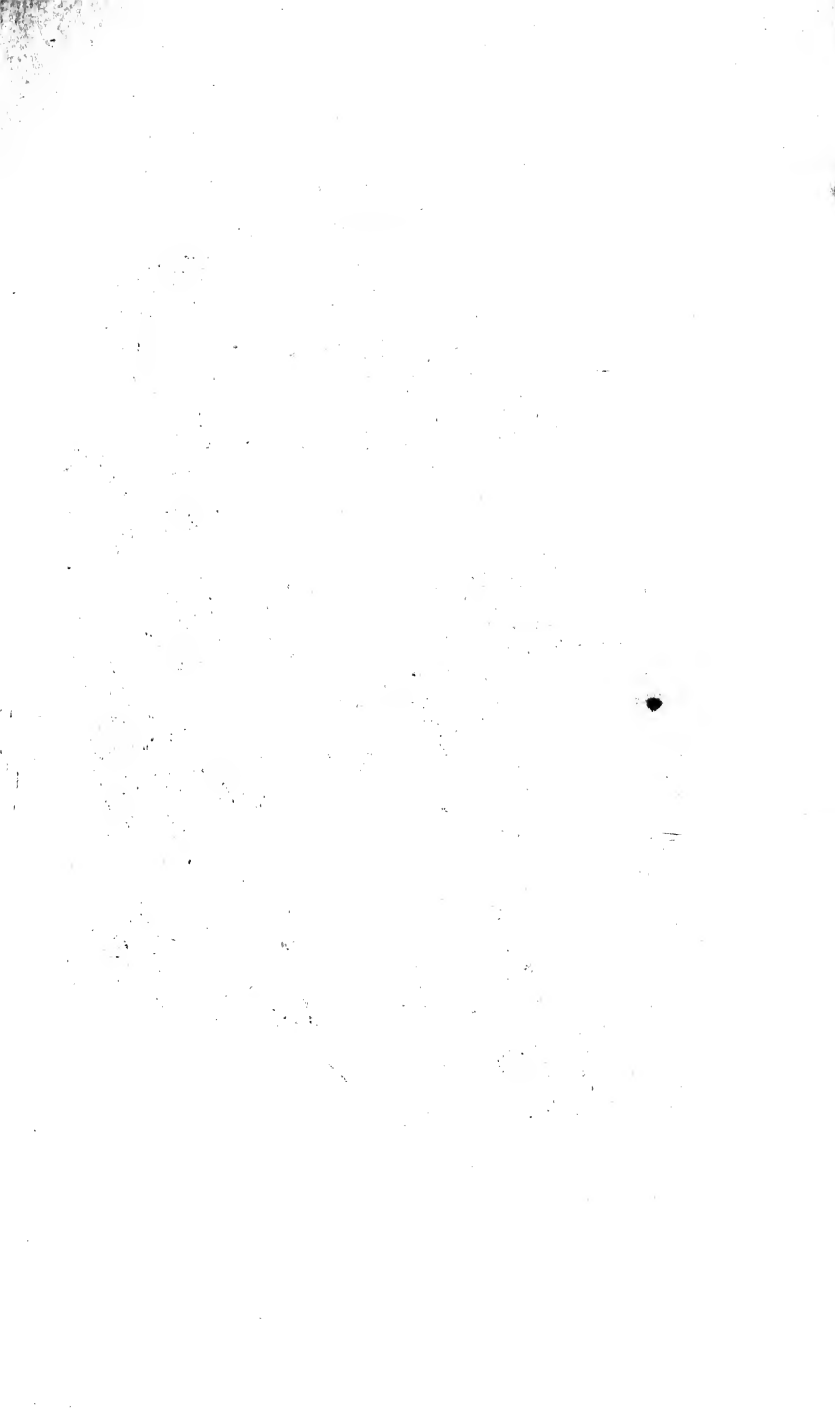
well he may be, but you're not to him what Master Langley was;—no," repeated the old lady, shaking her forefinger, and looking sideways at him, "not what Master Langley was; and your dear uncle's never been like the same man since that poor dear boy left us."

"You seem to be quite as fond of him as my uncle ever could have been, Miss Betsey," Fane remarked.

"Fond!" said Miss Betsey, "who wasn't? He had that coaxing way with him that he could"—she completed the sentence by flourishing her forefinger in the air, as if turning an imaginary person round it. "Everybody was fond of him;—the maids (the pretty ones in particular) was a'most too fond of him—so much so, that it rather interfered with their work."

Fane's smile at this proof of his cousin's irresistibility called forth a playful tap on the shoulder from the old virgin, who presently afterwards dived down into her pocket for her snuff-box, and screwing off the lid, which creaked like the axle of a stage waggon, stimulated her reminiscences with a pinch.

"Well-a-day! your uncle's never been the same man since. You don't know, perhaps" (whispering in a tone that fanned Fane's cheek with a zephyr combined of gin-and-water and princes' mixture), "that he keeps Master Langley's room locked up the same as the poor boy last left it, do you? There





now, I said so," giving him a gentle slap on the back, and retreating a pace, as he answered in the negative ; "for all you lived here weeks together, on and off, you never knew that. Come with me," added the old lady ; "I've got the key, and we'll go in there together."

Fane willingly followed her, taking deep interest in all fragments of his cousin's history. Arriving at the door of a room looking out on the lawn, Miss Betsey stopped, and, after some protracted fumbling at the keyhole, opened it. "Once or twice, when he thought nobody was watching him, I've seen your uncle coming out of this door with tears in his blessed eyes," said she, as she entered, preceding him with the candle.

The rooms were, as Miss Betsey had said, just as their former occupant had left them. The pieces of a fishing-rod, with their bag lying beside them, were scattered on the table, together with hackles, coloured worsteds, peacocks' herls, and other materials for fly-making. An open book was on the window-seat, and an unfinished sketch in oils stood on an easel.

"There," said Miss Betsy, holding the candle up to a painting over the mantelpiece, "there you see the dear fellow taking a leap that none of the others would face. Your uncle was so proud of that deed that he got it painted, as you see—and a pretty penny it cost him. There were other likenesses of

him here, but your uncle put 'em all away before you came from Indy."

Fane approached to look at the picture, which set at rest any uncertainty that might remain as to his cousin's identity with the rough-riding corporal. There was the same handsome face, only younger, and without the mustache. The same gay air and easy seat that distinguished the dragoon Onslow on horseback appeared in the sportsman there represented, who rode a gallant bay at a formidable brook, with a rail on the farther side. The work was highly artistic, being the production of a famous animal-painter.

At this stage of the proceedings Miss Betsey's feelings seemed to overpower her. She wept copiously, and even hiccupped with emotion; and, setting the candle on the table, abruptly retired.

Fane lingered round the room, looking at the backs of the books, and turning over portfolios of drawings, which would, of themselves, have identified the hand that produced them with Onslow's as exhibited in the sketch-book of Orelia. Among these was a coloured drawing of his uncle—a good likeness—and another of the artist himself. Fane, looking at the bold frank lineaments, internally pronounced it impossible that their possessor could have been guilty of the mean and criminal action imputed to him.

He pictured to himself, and contrasted his cousin's condition before he lost his uncle's favour, with his life as a soldier, and decided it to be contrary to experience that any one could, under such a startling change of circumstances, have behaved so well, had he been conscious of guilt.

After some time spent in these and similar meditations, suggested by the objects around him, he went out and locked the door. Passing the housekeeper's room, he went in to leave the key. Miss Betsey appeared to have been soothing her emotions with more gin-and-water, for she sat still in her elbow-chair, with her wonderful structure of cap fallen over one eye, in a manner that rather impaired her dignity, while she winked the remaining one at him with a somewhat imbecile smile.

"Come, Miss Betsey," said Fane, "let me see you to bed."

Miss Betsey rose, and, taking his offered arm, they proceeded slowly along the passage together. "By Jove," thought Fane, "if those youngsters, Bruce and Oates, could see me now, what a story they'd make of it!"

"You must make haste and get a wife, Mr Durham," said Miss Betsey, whose thoughts seemed to be taking a tender hue—"though, to be sure, you're not such a one for the ladies as Mr Langley was"—

and here the old lady commenced the relation of an anecdote, in which a certain housemaid, whom she stigmatised as a hussey, bore a prominent part, but which we will not rescue from the obscurity in which her somewhat indistinct utterance veiled it.

Fane opened the old lady's bedroom door, and, putting the candle on the table, left her, not without a misgiving that she might possibly set fire to her cap, and consequently to the ceiling. This fear impressed him so much that he went back and removed it from her head, and with it a row of magnificent brown curls, which formed its basis, and, depositing the edifice, not without wonder, on the drawers, he wished her good night, and retreated ; but, hearing her door open when he had got half-way along the passage, he looked back, and saw Miss Betsey's head, deprived of the meretricious advantages of hair, gauze, and ribbon, protruded shiningly into the passage, as she smiled, with the utmost blandness, a supplementary good-night.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"YOU seem so much better to-day," said Mr Payne next morning to Mr Levitt, "that I think I shall leave you alone with the Captain, and go down to Larches, where I have not paid my customary visit for a couple of weeks past."

"By all means," said the invalid ; "I should like to go with you if I could. I've a little curiosity to see that young lady of yours" (which Mr Payne knew to signify that his friend felt a warm interest in Orelia, though he had never seen her since she was a child). "She's handsome, you say?"

"Really," said Mr Payne, "making due deduction for a parent's partiality, I should say you wouldn't often see a finer young woman."

"And accomplished too!—and high-spirited. Payne, do you know, I wish you'd take Durham down with you. I'm quite well enough to do without anybody now."

"To be sure," said Mr Payne ; "if you think you can spare him, I shall be delighted. 'Twill do Orelia good, too, for she, and a friend of hers, who is staying with her, seem to me to be falling into a sort of religious melancholy, and, to tell you the truth, it has caused me a good deal of anxiety."

"And if—if the two should take a fancy to each other—Payne, I needn't say that my heir would lose nothing in my estimation with your daughter for a wife. I once indulged in some little castle-building of that kind, of which Durham was not the hero."

"Ah, we won't speak of that now, my dear friend," said Mr Payne hastily. "I'll go at once, and ask the Captain to join me."

Accordingly, he went off to propose the visit to Durham.

"It needn't be dull for you," said Mr Payne, "even if you shouldn't succeed in finding Langley. Besides my daughter there's a friend of hers, a very charming person, whom I think you must know—Lady Lee."

Fane answered shortly and stiffly that he had that pleasure.

"Come," said Mr Payne, "this is fortunate. We'll start after lunch, and get down to Larches by dinner-time. Frewenham is just fifty miles from here."

Fane agreed. Since finding out that Orelia lived near Frewenham, he divined at once why Langley's

steps should be drawn in that direction, and made sure of finding him there. Accordingly, after lunch, they set off, and repaired in Mr Levitt's carriage to the railway, which took them the greater part of their journey.

Fane was but a silent companion. He was about, then, to see Lady Lee again—to be under the same roof with her ; that was the text on which his thoughts discoursed. Was it not foolhardy to run into the dangerous proximity?—to expose himself to the influence of charms which could never be his? On the other hand, would it not be mere weakness to avoid it? Why should he permit his movements to be governed, his feelings played upon, by a woman who had preferred another to him?—who was probably awaiting but the expiration of her period of mourning to be the wife of another—of a man he despised. Besides, he had some curiosity to see how she would receive and treat him. Yes, that was it! Curiosity was the feeling that made him wish to see her again.

And Fane, though as sensible a fellow as you would be likely to meet, and by no means given to self-deception, really persuaded himself that his anxiety once more to behold Lady Lee proceeded entirely from curiosity. If he had a lurking doubt about that, there were plenty of other plausible reasons to satisfy his conscience ; for, even admitting

curiosity to be too trivial a feeling to cause him to accept Mr Payne's invitation, yet how could he help accompanying him? Mr Payne was such an old friend of his uncle's—and his uncle wished it too; and then he should be glad to see Orelia again—he had a great regard for Orelia! Above all, there was the prospect of securing his cousin Langley—oh, there were reasons enough why he should be anxious and eager for the termination of the journey, quite independent of the prospect of seeing Lady Lee. Moreover, there was nothing he despised so much as a man who would give a second thought to a woman after he had ascertained that she didn't care for him.

Didn't care for him!—here he left arguing, and branched off into recollections—such as he had a thousand times before banished, and resolved to have done with for ever. Was her treatment of him, at one time, that of a woman who didn't care for him? Was she a likely person to be guilty of setting traps for a man just to feed her vanity? Wasn't she the reverse of everything hollow, trifling, and insincere? These questions resulted in the satisfactory and novel general axiom that women were unaccountable beings, and as changeable as the moon.

They had quitted the railway at Frewenham, and Fane stood at the door of the principal hotel awaiting the harnessing of a horse to the gig which was to

convey them to Larches (which operation Mr Payne was superintending), when he felt a hand laid gently on his arm, and a voice said, "Bless me, Captain Fane, is that you? Who'd have thought it!"

Fane turned and beheld Miss Fillett. Kitty was dressed in sober-coloured and sober-cut garments, very different from the coquettish array in which she had been accustomed, when Fane last saw her, to go flirting about the precincts of the Heronry. Her very face seemed to have lost its pert expression; at least, if not quite lost, it was driven to lurk in the corners of her mouth and eyes. Beside her walked a youth of about fourteen, in whose features might be traced a strong family likeness to Kitty.

"How d'ye do, Kitty? You've come here with your lady, have you?" said Fane.

"This is my nittive place," answered Miss Fillett. "I'm living with my own family, though I do see my lady and Miss Payne from time to time. My lady took me from here when she married. This is my brother, Captain," looking at the youth at her side. "Go on, Thomas," she said to this relative, "and wait for me at the meeting-house door; and mind you have nothink to say to them depraved boys that's always playing marbles there."

Thomas departed. "Why, goodness gracious, Captain, what bekim of you that time you left us so

CHAPTER XLVIII.

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Kitty's conscience had, as she said, smitten her since the loss of Julius for the share which she had taken in Bagot's schemes, and she now, as soon as Fane reached her, began, with much circumlocutory penitence, to hint at what she called her lady's parshality for Fane—told what she knew of the

Colonel's design on Sloperton, and how she had helped to forward it—mentioned the circumstances which gave Bagot his power over Lady Lee—and, lastly, described the final exit which Sloperton had made in apparent discomfiture from the Heronry. She naturally took some pains to excuse her own complicity, but she might have spared them; Fane attended to, and cared for, nothing but the leading facts, which showed him how he had been imposed on; and when she stopt, he actually caught Kitty round the neck and kissed her.

“Good Hevins, Captain!” said Miss Fillett, who, probably from surprise, had submitted quietly to the salute, “why, I never! ain’t you ashamed? Do behave, sir!”

“’Twas a kiss of pure gratitude,” said Fane, “and might have been given by a hermit to a saint, Kitty. I shall always look on you as a benefactor.”

“And—and—you’ll speak to my lady for me, sir?” said Kitty.

“To be sure I will,” said Fane, “only you mustn’t intrigue any more with the Colonel,” he added, laughing.

He was hastening off, when he suddenly remembered that he had intended to ask Kitty if she had seen anything of the dragoon Onslow in Frewenham, and hurried back to put the question.

swathed up like a mummy's, but who smiled, nevertheless, in spite of her teeth. He was altogether absorbed in the contemplation of Lady Lee, who sat at the foot of the table, her soup untouched, her cheek resting on her hand, her look turned aside towards a small foot which peeped from beneath her black dress.

How long he might have so stood is uncertain ; but Mr Payne's advancing step and voice now caused them all to look up, and they saw Fane standing in the doorway. Lady Lee visibly started ; her bosom and shoulders gave one quick heave, and her colour flushed up for a moment. Orelia's spoon stopped on its way to her mouth—she calmly laid it down, and rose to receive her visitors.

Fane, acting up to his principle that it would be mere weakness to allow himself to show any feeling beyond strict civility towards her ladyship, rather, as is customary in such cases, overdid his part, and threw such an extreme amount of indifference into his salutation, that the warmth with which she came forward to meet him was dissipated in a moment. Chilled and hurt, she resumed her seat in silence.

Fane, supporting his character of chance and uninterested visitor with great success, conversed fluently on a variety of topics, though it would have puzzled him to remember his own remarks half an hour after.

It was one of the few occasions in his life when he had acted a part, and he, of course, overacted it. He was pointedly amusing to Orelia; he listened with great attention to the inanities of Priscilla, lending the most courteous ear to a protracted account of her toothache; but when Lady Lee spoke, which only happened once or twice, though her voice made his heart beat, he manifested no consciousness of her presence. Once or twice, addressing some trivial remark to her, he caught her eyes fixed on him with a look of sorrowful surprise, but they were immediately averted.

Mr Payne did not find Fane more sociable, when the ladies left them to their wine, than he had on the journey. At tea with the ladies he resumed his former demeanour; and afterwards Orelia, thinking to do him and Hester a kindness, set her father and Priscilla down to double dummy, in a remote corner, and sat by the card-table herself.

Fane felt rather awkward, and glanced at Lady Lee, who was reading. Presently he found himself approaching her—not that he would have owned himself impelled to take that course—not at all; he set it all down to civility—he couldn't leave her sitting there by herself, you know. But he would be very guarded; he would try to hit the line between

the confidence of friends and the reserve of new acquaintances, so that his present demeanour might blend harmoniously into their ancient intimacy on the one hand, and the distant civility that was to exist between them in future, on the other.

Lady Lee did not seem so absorbed in her book as not to notice his approach ; for though she did not look round, she coloured a little, and tremulously turned over two leaves at once, without discovering the gap thus left in the narrative. She laid the volume down when he took a seat near and addressed her.

"This must be a pleasant place of your friend's when the flowers are in bloom," said Fane.

"Very."

"No doubt you feel quite at home here."

"Certainly ; the happiest years of my life were spent here."

"I trust," said Fane, "they may soon lose the distinction of being the happiest."

"That is very unlikely,"—(with a sigh.)

A pause. Strange to say, the thought that Lady Lee had no happiness immediately in store for her, did not altogether displease Fane.

"Happiness often takes us unawares," said Fane ; "and," he added, "another of its peculiarities, as we all know, is to slip from us as we prepare to close our

grasp on it. Most of us experience much oftener its elusive power than its pleasant surprises."

"Yours used to be a more cheerful philosophy," said Lady Lee. "I remember, in one of our last conversations, you denounced those views of life which are tinged with complaint or despondency, as unmanly and untrue."

"I suspect our philosophy comes more from without than within," he said; "and we preach hope or cynicism as we happen to be prosperous or disappointed."

"I should regret," said Lady Lee, in a low tone "to hear that you had any real cause for such a change."

"Our opinions as to what might or might not be a real cause would possibly differ," returned Fane. "Of course, if one has bound up one's happiness in some ideal which turns out to be a delusion, there is perhaps no one to blame but one's-self. I say perhaps, because the deception may have been so complete as to excuse the credulity; but, at any rate, one must not then find fault with views of life which others, more fortunate, are justified in adhering to."

"It must be a weaker belief in good than I had fancied Captain Fane's to be, which a single error can shake," said Lady Lee.

"But if the error is so important as to upset all

calculation," said Fane. "If I have been all my life —. But I will not talk of myself," he said, breaking off, as he perceived how near dangerous ground he was treading. "What is the book you are reading?"

"It has a radical fault in your eyes," said Lady Lee; "it is written by a woman."

"Ah!" said Fane, "I remember I used to think it a kind of desecration for a woman to confide her sentiments to the world; and the finer the sentiments, the more it seemed to me a pity that they should ever be blown on by the rude breath of the public. If she must write them, let her write them in her journal, or her letters to a chosen few—perhaps a chosen one; but to trot her feelings out, to show the form and paces of her mind to cold-eyed critics and gaping fools, I would as soon see the woman I loved capering in the scantiest gauze at the opera. So I used to say."

"Used to say!" said Lady Lee. "Are your opinions on this point changing too?"

"Yes," said Fane, with a good deal of unconscious bitterness in his tone—"yes; I begin to think that if a woman's sentiments do not influence her life in its chief actions, it is of no great consequence what becomes of them; let her trumpet them in the market-place, if she likes, after the manner of a proclama-

tion. I don't mean to say they should be always manifesting themselves in every petty action, but they should colour her existence, and influence its main outlines. But if these sentiments and feelings would never have found expression at all if not in writing—if, by presenting them to the public, she is robbing her daily life of no delicate tint—then my objections to female authorship are gone; but with them is also gone some of my belief in the excellence of feminine nature.”

Can he have left Doddington on some love enterprise, and been disappointed? whispered Lady Lee's heart; or can the sharpness of his tone be meant for me? A dim thought that he might be alluding to her marriage with Sir Joseph crossed her mind. Poor woman! no wonder she was puzzled; she could not see the handsome, self-complacent, coxcombical image of Sloperton, which to Fane's fancy sat between them, like Banquo's ghost, and seemed to push him from his stool.

“Perhaps,” she said presently—“perhaps you are on principle getting rid of some of the tenets of your former faith, stripping yourself, that you may be the lighter to run the race of ambition; for you never denied you were ambitious, you know.”

“I never did,” said Fane; “but I do now. For do but consider, Lady Lee, if my faith in my ideals

has vanished, if the companionship and reflected interest which these give to a man's efforts are no longer among his prospects, where is he to look for the stimulus and reward of ambition ? ”

“ You show a dreary picture,” said Lady Lee, with an unconscious sigh ; “ but then ambition is a dreary thing, and does not seem, in general, to look for sympathy as its reward.”

“ True,” said Fane ; “ and when I see men long past their youth joining in the contest for fame, I always ask myself where lies their inducement ?—Not in love, for they have outlived it—not in friendship, for they reject it—not even in applause, for to that they seem not to listen. They seem actuated by an insane desire to climb to a barren eminence, and there die. For my own part, I could not value nor wish for fame, unless I could read it focussed and reflected in ——. But I will not trouble you with my abandoned aspirations and opinions ; I leave them, with my other theories, to some one who has not yet discovered that he is a dreamer of dreams.”

Fane imagined that he had conducted the conversation so as to show perfect indifference and independence. It never occurred to him that he would not have talked thus, nor on such subjects, to a woman he did not care about.

When Lady Lee went to her room that night,

Orelia followed her, and, sitting down by her side on the sofa at the foot of the bed, looked inquiringly into her eyes. Lady Lee knew what she meant, but, having nothing to say, said nothing. She only turned away and sighed ; and Orelia, kissing her forehead, bid her good night.

Ah, if Fane could have afterwards seen Lady Lee whispering her sorrow to her pillow in the watches of the night, what a pebble he must have been had he not run to comfort her. But he couldn't see her, for there was a solid wall separating her room from the one where he strode to and fro musingly.

If it is hard for two, who would gladly give up all and everything for each other, to find inseparable obstacles interposed between them, must it not be the devil's spite for them to discover, perhaps in the next world, that they were divided in this one by some merely imaginary bar—some difference that a word would have dissipated ?

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In reply, Miss Fillett dived down into her pocket, and extracting therefrom a yellow printed paper, she unfolded it, smoothed out the creases against her knee, and gave it to Fane.

It was a playbill, and announced, under the special patronage of the mayor and corporation of Frewenham, Sheridan's comedy of the Rivals for that night.

"Well, Kitty, what has this to do with the matter?" asked Fane. Kitty pointed to the list of *dramatis personæ*.

"*'Sir Anthony Absolute—Mr Cavendish,'*" Fane read. "*'Captain Absolute—Mr Onslow.'* What, he's gone on the stage, then!" Fane paused to consider. He had plenty to occupy him that morning; it must have been very urgent business indeed that would keep him that morning away from Larches; he could see his cousin as well at night, as now—yes; he would go to the play, see him act, and discover himself afterwards.

"I knew him the minute I set eyes on him," said Kitty, "for all he have shaved off his mustache. They say he acts beautiful—and I must own to a sinful wish to see him. But plays," added Kitty piously, "is vanity."

"Come to-night, Kitty," said Fane, dropping his purse into the pocket of her apron; "perhaps we may have occasion for a little more talk together,

since you seem to know so much of what's been going on at the Heronry, and I can't spare a moment to hear it now. Come by all means, Kitty, and I'll promise you absolution," and he once more quitted, her, going back at his swiftest pace to Larches; while Miss Fillett, after a short struggle with herself, determined to see Onslow act that night, let the Rev. Mr Fallalove and Co. say what they might about it.

Fane entered the drawing-room at Larches, just as Lady Lee was going out by another door. She turned a pale tearful face towards him, and was going to give him a distant salutation, when the slight movement was arrested, and the expression changed to one of surprise, as he hurried up and seized her hand.

"I have a long explanation to give," he said, "and then I think you will forgive me. But first let me say what has been on my mind for this long time," which he did in three words.

Lady Lee did not carry out her original intention of quitting the room; in fact, she forgot it altogether. She allowed him to lead her to a seat, and listened with deep attention. Fane had a turn for arrangement, and therefore (after the compendious preamble or overture of three words above-mentioned) he began his tale at the beginning. He told Lady Lee, with a degree of eloquence that altogether astonished him-

self, how he had first admired, secondly loved her ; how her seemingly capricious treatment of him had caused him to alternate between hope and despair—and of his interview with Josiah ; and to all this her ladyship listened with the sweetest patience, her eyes being sometimes downcast, sometimes fixed on Fane. But when he told her of the consent which Sloperton had procured and exhibited to him, patience gave way to indignation ; her eyes, neither downcast nor fixed on Fane, sparkled with anger, which was presently quenched in tears. This stage passed, he told of his dreary existence since, and of his efforts to forget her—of the cause of his coming to Larches, involving the episode of his cousin Langley and Orelia ; and wound up his epic by swearing he was now the happiest rascal in existence, and kissing her ladyship's hand.

She, too, had a little tale to tell—of her unhappiness and anxiety—her futile attempts to account for his sudden departure and continued absence ; and it is really enough to make one ashamed of one's species, and to cause one to believe in Rochefoucault, Thackeray, and other cynic philosophers, to know that Fane listened to this account of her woes with positive pleasure, and was raised to a state bordering on rapture at hearing that the night before had been passed by her in sleeplessness and tears.

They got no farther than this before lunch ; but Orelia, seeing at a glance how things were going, left them alone together after that meal—and the conclusion they arrived at before dinner was this, that after an interval granted to Hester's sorrow, they should be married—with Bagot's consent, if that were obtainable by purchase, or otherwise—if not, they would be married without it, and let him do his worst.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THAT building which in Frewenham was now devoted to the drama, bore, in general, but little resemblance to a theatre. It was a long narrow room enclosed by four isolated walls, and had been built by an enterprising master-mason as a speculation. It was the public room of Frewenham. Here balls took place; here lectures were delivered; here public meetings were held. It served all sorts of opposite purposes; and here—where only a few days before an enthusiastic missionary had collected plates-ful of money from the devout inhabitants of Frewenham in aid of a project for convincing the Kaffirs, by the power of moral reasoning, of the advantages of universal peace and brotherhood, and subsequently forming them into a great South African Tee-total Society—here such of the pleasure-loving portion of the townsfolk as could command the price of admission, were now assembled to witness Sheridan's comedy.

One end of this room was divided from the rest, partly by a painted wooden partition, which stretched across the ceiling and down the sides, partly by a green baize curtain in the centre of it. In front of the curtain flared and smoked a row of footlights, diffusing an odour suggestive at once of train-oil and boiled mutton.

The stage being on the ground-floor, there was no pit, properly so called—a row of forms, at a few feet from the footlights, evidently represented the boxes, inasmuch as their occupants paid highest for their seats; but this was the only advantage they possessed over the pit and gallery behind them, except that the vapour of the footlights was there inhaled in greater freshness and perfection. The orchestra was raised on one side of the boxes, and consisted of a violoncello, a serpent, and two fiddles, all belonging to the county militia. The musicians were perfectly well known to the audience, which was a great comfort to those impatient persons in the gallery, who had stormed the door and rushed in about an hour and a half before the play commenced, for they were enabled to relieve their otherwise painful suspense by calling to them by name for favourite airs, and making them the subjects of many playful allusions. “Rub your elbow with the rosin, Jim,” shouted a wag to the leader of the band, who was

preparing his violin-bow with that substance; "there was too much rheumatism in that last tune." "Your serpent's got a hoaze, Biffin," cried another, to the performer on that wind instrument: "put him in 'ot flannel when you go home, and don't bring him out no more o' nights." "Cherry ripe!" shouted a chorus of voices. "Music, play up!" "Polly put the kettle on!" demanded an opposition chorus—and faction ran so high between the adverse connoisseurs, that, when the music struck up, nobody knew what they were playing—while the gallery, with its darkness visible, and the confusion that reigned in its obscurest nooks, where the choice spirits had collected, presented the aspect of an amiable pandemonium, till the rising of the curtain produced an instantaneous calm.

Fane had entered early, and stood leaning against the wall watching the entry of the spectators, who gradually filled the house. The green baize on the seats in the boxes became invisible foot by foot, as careful fathers and matrons selected good points of view for themselves and offspring—as a young ladies' school entered in a body, and with demureness, relieved by private titters under each other's bonnets, ranged themselves in order—as gay bachelors, who had been chatting with female acquaintances at a distance, rushed to secure their places.

Cheerfulness and expectation prevailed ; but the person among all the audience, whose feelings Fane envied most, was a sharp-looking little boy, in a red frock with black specks on it, and a magnificent feathered hat, who came in with his papa and brothers, and, being placed on his feet in the front row, gazed round him with intense delight. Fane remembered that the last time he had been in such a place he was about that age and size, and he knew that the scene was, to that little boy, the most charming spot on earth ; that he had dreamt of it for two or three previous nights, at least—that the smell of the foot-lights was a sweet savour in his nostrils, the noise in the gallery solemn music in his ears—the whole place paradise—and that he would watch the progress of the drama with breathless interest, and most uncriticising faith. There was an elder brother of his, too, who appeared, probably for the first time in his life, in Wellington boots and a shirt-collar, to his great pride and discomfort ; and Fane guessed with considerable correctness that this youth would conceive an ardent and respectful passion for the lady who did Lydia Languish.

Presently, as the place began to fill, a stout gentleman stood up and blew his nose like a trumpet, and, after replacing his handkerchief with much ceremony

in his pocket, gazed round him with great sternness and dignity. He was evidently a man of the first importance in a civic point of view—his bunch of seals was massive, his hair was brushed ferociously up from his forehead, and his shirt-collars appeared to be cutting his ears off. As the noise in the gallery increased, he lifted up his hand majestically, as if to calm the tumult; still it went on—he shook his head as if at so many noisy children, when a voice was heard to shout amid the din, “Hark to old Bribery and Corruption!” which was the nickname the stout gentleman was known by among his fellow-townsmen, in consequence of some valuable electioneering qualities—whereupon he turned away redder than ever, and stooping down, pretended to whisper to another stout gentleman, who shook his head, frowning fiercely, and said the rascals had been getting more impudent every day since the passing of the Reform Bill.

Fane saw Kitty Fillett steal in, accompanied by her young brother, and silently seat herself in the pit—a sort of purgatory, or middle state between the inferno of the gallery, and the paradise of the boxes. She seemed anxious to avoid notice, but in this she was disappointed, for she was presently recognised by some vigilant censors in the gallery. “Won’t Miss Fillett ask a blessing?” cried one. “No back-

sliders," shouted another. "Give her the Old Hundredth," said a third, addressing the orchestra—whereat Miss Fillett, wrapping her shawl nervously about her, looked around, sniffing in high scorn and defiance.

Presently a little bell rang, and the curtain drew up.

Fane recognised the dragoon directly Captain Absolute entered, and saw in a moment that the high encomium passed by Mr Payne on Langley's powers as an actor was no more than just. He infused great spirit into the part, and made the points tell admirably. He was dressed in perfect taste, and looked so handsome and high-bred, that the entire young ladies' school fell in love with him, and two teachers began to pine away from that very night; while Lydia Languish, a showy-looking girl, acted the love scenes with a degree of warmth that showed she must either be a mistress of that kind of acting, or else not acting at all. Sir Anthony, too, was remarkably well acted by an old man, the manager of the company, who called himself Mr Cavendish. The costumes were correct, and in excellent taste; and some of the scenes were admirably painted in a style that Fane at once ascribed to Langley's pencil.

The curtain fell at the end of the last act amid great approbation. Shortly afterwards, old Mr

Cavendish made his appearance before the curtain, to announce that the Infant Roscius was about to appear as Young Norval, and to request that, however much the audience might approve his performance, they would refrain from loud applause, as that would probably put such an inexperienced performer out in his part.

Again the bell rang, and the curtain ascended creaking. After a pause Young Norval entered, clad in full Highland costume. He seemed about four or five years old, and came in with a sort of mock manliness in his gait, which at once insured him the sympathies of the female portion of the audience. In fact, Fane heard one young lady near pronounce him a "darling" before he opened his mouth, while another expressed a desire to kiss him.

The juvenile tragedian having informed the audience, in a bold lisp, that his name was Norval, and having mentioned the "*Gwampian hills*" as the place of his paternal abode, was proceeding to describe his connection with the warlike lord, when a voice in the pit was heard to exclaim, "Master Juley ! O goodness gracious, Master Juley !"

Young Norval paused with an amazed air — fumbled with his dirk — looked about him for a moment, and, forgetting his heroic character, began

to cry. Again the voice in the pit was heard. "Master Juley," it cried, "come to Kitty!" when the drop-scene suddenly descended, with great swiftness, and hid him from view.

A great commotion now took place in the house, especially the pit, where the fainting form of Kitty Fillett was seen passed from hand to hand on its way to the open air. Fane, on hearing her exclamation, had quitted the house, and ran round to the stage-door, which he entered. The first person he encountered was Captain Absolute, who was standing with his back towards him, but who turned instantly as Fane called out "Langley."

"You know who I am then?" he said, advancing.
"I saw you among the audience."

"I've been following you these six weeks," said Fane, shaking his hand. "First let me see the child, and I'll speak to you afterwards." At that moment the old manager passed, making for the stage-door, with Julius kicking and struggling in his arms. Fane, laying one hand on the shoulder of the old gentleman, lifted the boy from him with the other. Julius recognised Fane at once, and, calling him by name, ceased crying.

Mr Holmes (for the manager was no other than that venerable person) surrendered the boy at once. "Allow me to speak to you one moment, sir," he

said, drawing Fane aside by the arm. "Doubtless you intend to restore him to his friends," said Mr Holmes, in a calm business-like tone.

"Instantly," said Fane. "But how came he with you, when he is believed dead by his friends? You will have to account for this."

Mr Holmes looked round, to see that no one was within earshot, and, motioning to Fane to stoop, he whispered in his ear.

"Good God!" said Fane, as Mr Holmes ceased. "I can't believe it. And yet, why not? But this may be a slander of yours, to screen yourself, and gain time to escape."

"Me!" said Mr Holmes, shrugging his shoulders, and spreading out his palms. "I shall make no attempt to escape. My account of the matter is plain, so far as I am concerned. I was requested to take charge of the young gentleman, and accepted it. Then naturally comes the question, By whom were you requested? And whether a public answer will be satisfactory to the young gentleman's family and friends, you may judge for yourself."

"The old scoundrel is right," muttered Fane. "It cannot be kept too quiet." Then he said aloud, "This will be matter for his friends to decide on; in the mean time, I shall take him to his mother."

"One word more," said Mr Holmes. "I have

reason to believe it was intended to restore the young gentleman to his family very shortly. It was with that view, I imagine, that I received directions to proceed to this place ; though I didn't know they were in this neighbourhood."

Fane, still holding Julius in his arms, now went towards the door. As he passed Langley, he stopped and drew out his watch. "It is now ten," said he. "Can you, in an hour from this, meet me, Langley, at the hotel in Fore Street?" Langley assented, and Fane left the theatre.

Miss Fillett having been conveyed by charitable hands into the open air, had been forthwith surrounded by a circle of her own sex, who fanned her face, stuffed hartshorn and smelling-salts up her nose, beat her hands, and adopted other established remedies for her restoration. These had so far recovered her that, on seeing Fane emerge with Julius, she broke from the sympathetic females around her, and, snatching the young baronet, cast herself on her knees on the pavement, and squeezed him in her arms, murmuring hysterically, and shedding tears over him.

"Where is the hold villain?" said Kitty presently, looking round in search of Mr Holmes. "It misgives me, the moment I see him, that I knew his ugly old face. Let me kin to him. I'll tear his eyes out."

A word in her ear from Fane, however, induced

her to defer her vengeance for the present ; and he prevailed on her to come with Julius, whom she would not let out of her clutch for an instant, to the hotel, where a conveyance might be got to convey them to Larches ; and thither they accordingly repaired, attended by a considerable crowd, who had been solacing themselves by listening outside the theatre to catch stray sounds and music, and obtaining hasty glimpses of a green baize screen whenever the door was opened.

A quarter of an hour saw them speeding along in a dog-cart, Fane driving, and Fillett holding the recovered little baronet in her lap. He slept there soundly. "Dear soul !" said Fillett, looking down at him, and covering him with her shawl, "he used to be always a-bed by eight o'clock. We shan't get speech of him to-night."

They stopt at a little distance from the cottage, and a stable-boy who sat behind took the reins to hold the horse till the return of Fane, who now proceeded with Fillett and her charge to the house.

There was a light in the drawing-room, and Fane, going softly up, and standing on a flower-bed underneath, peeped in. He was very glad to see Orelia seated there, reading, alone, and, returning to Fillett, he took Julius from her, and sent her in to prepare Miss Payne for the strange news of his recovery.

Fillett went, and Fane heard the murmur of their

voices for a minute or two—when Orelia's grew louder—the drawing-room door opened, and forth she came in such tempestuous fashion, that it was fortunate she ran against nobody in the passage. Seeing Julius asleep in Fane's arms as he stood in the porch, and recognising the boy instantly in spite of his Highland costume, she snatched him eagerly, and covered him with kisses. "I wonder what Langley would give for one or two of those," said Fane to himself, as he followed her to the drawing-room.

In answer to her breathless inquiries, he told how he had found Julius, and the reasons which appeared to exist for keeping his abduction as secret as possible. Then they consulted together as to the best mode of breaking the news to Lady Lee. "I'll go and tell her immediate," said the excited Fillett. "I ain't afraid to face my lady now."

"Stay, my good girl," said Fane; "we mustn't be rash. Miss Payne, you could prepare her better than any one."

Orelia went away, and, after a short absence, returned to the drawing-room.

"Hester is asleep," said she; "I was afraid to wake her."

"Right," said Fane. "But what do you think, Miss Payne, of placing Julius, who doesn't seem likely to wake till morning, by his mother's side?"

"Ho!" said Kitty, "the very thing!—and when my lady wakes, she'll think 'tis a dream."

"Do you know," said Orelia, "that strikes me as a happy thought of yours. I'm resolved it shall be done—yes—it shall." So saying, she took up the slumbering Julius, and desiring Fillett to accompany her, conveyed him to her own room; while Fane quitted the house to rejoin Langley, saying he would return for news in the morning.

Arrived in her chamber, Orelia desired Kitty to undress Julius, an office she was well accustomed to, and gladly undertook. He fretted a little, in a sleepy way, at being disturbed, and thrust his knuckles into his eyes; but the moment the disrobing was accomplished he relapsed into sound slumbers, with a long-drawn sigh. "Bless you," said Kitty, "he'd sleep now if you put him standing on his head on the floor, the dear!"

Orelia, on her first visit to Hester's room, had left a light there. Very softly she now re-entered, bearing her young friend, with his head against her bosom, his bare legs dangling perpendicularly from the bend of her arm, and, stealing to the side of the bed, stood looking at its occupant, while Kitty, with elaborate caution, crept after. The youthfulness of Hester's look, as she lay with her face turned up till her chin approached her upraised shoulder, struck

Orelia—she beheld the Hester of five years before. She stood a moment gazing at her, figuring to herself the astonishment that would appear in those eyes when their lids were next raised; then she motioned to Fillett, who turned down the bed-clothes far enough to admit Julius, and Orelia, stooping silently down, deposited him with his head on the pillow near Lady Lee's. It seemed a matter of indifference to him what they did with him; he merely rubbed his nose with his hand, as if something tickled it, made a noise with his lips as if tasting something, and slept on. Lady Lee, too, slept quietly; and Orelia, after having once or twice turned to look at them, withdrew with Kitty. She closed the door softly, then, listening, thought she heard a noise—reopened it—it was only Lady Lee turning in her sleep; she now lay with her face turned to the boy's, and her arm across his neck—and Orelia retired to her own room.

Fane found Langley waiting at the hotel door, and, taking his arm, drew him into a private room. As he had dined early, and imagined his cousin had probably done so too, he ordered supper forthwith. "We should be hungry enough before we had half done talking," said Fane. "First, while supper is getting ready, I'll have my say."

Accordingly he told his cousin how he had got

a clue to their relationship by means of the seal ring at the silversmith's—of his late visit to their uncle—of his uncle's smothered affection for Langley—of the visit with Miss Betsey to his old apartments—of his conversation with Mr Payne ; which last, however, he recapitulated only so far as it related to the manner in which Langley had first provoked his uncle, saying nothing at present about the forgery, which he wished to hear Langley's own version of.

His cousin listened eagerly—seemed surprised at the share his ring had borne in detecting him—smiled at Fane's mention of Miss Betsey, and interrupted him to characterise her as a “jolly old woman.” But the account of the rooms, still preserved in the state he had left them in, and of his uncle's nocturnal visits to them, excited deeper emotion. He rose from his chair, walked about the room, and, when he resumed his seat, brushed off some moisture from his eyelashes.

“I believe in my soul,” said Langley, “that he once loved me better than anything on earth. But his last letter to me was so harsh, so severe in tone, that I imagined I should not have obtained forgiveness, even had I sought it. To seek it, however, was far from my thoughts ; my uncle's condemnation of my conduct was mild compared with my own, and

I had resolved, before his letter came, never to look on his face again till I could do so without shame."

"You must have played the very deuce," observed Fane, "to call forth these feelings in him and yourself, 'Twas play, I suppose, that did it."

"Yes," said Langley, "that finished me; but I had no turn for saving, and I had, besides, dropt a good deal on a favourite for the Leger. All my uncle's allowance went. I asked for more—'twas sent with some caustic remarks: next time, the remarks were angry, instead of caustic—then bitter. At last, while playing to win back, I lost all I had. I sold everything, and was still a hundred pounds short. This sum I wrote to my uncle for, assuring him 'twas the last time I should ever trouble him. He evidently didn't believe me, for, with the check for a hundred, came the letter I already told you of, the harshest he had ever written."

"Well?" said Fane impatiently, seeing him pause.

"I paid my gaming debts, in some of which I suspected foul play, though it would have been difficult to prove that. All paid, I found myself with about fifteen shillings, and a suit of clothes, as my sole possessions, to make a fresh start in the world with. I left London, making my way on foot towards a seaport; and, while making a meal of bread and cheese, to be paid for with my last remaining

coin, a recruiting sergeant spoke to me, and I enlisted directly. You know my career afterwards, till I left the Heronry Lodge."

"But the last check from my uncle," said Fane, "I want to hear about that. To whom did you pay it?"

"To the man I had lost most to, and who had the greatest share in my ruin," said Langley. "He came to my lodgings on the day I received it. I threw it across the table to him, telling him, calmly enough outwardly, that I was done for, and that he would never hear of me more, for that my intention was to quit the country that very day."

"And you saw nothing more of him?" said Fane.

"Never till we met on the day of the review in the Heronry grounds," returned Levitt, "when he seemed confused enough at the meeting, as well he might, for, as I say, Seager had more to do with my ruin than anybody."

"Seager!" exclaimed Fane. "I always thought him a horrible rascal. 'Twas to him, then, you transferred your check?"

"Yes," said Langley; "and, at the same time, I showed him the letter that accompanied it, that he might see the kind of misery such proceedings as his lead to. He read it—threw it back to me. 'All up there,' said he; 'the old boy's done with you—what

do you mean to do ?' I told him I should quit the country that very day. He approved of this design, and offered to pay my passage to any foreign port I chose. This I declined ; and, meeting the recruiting party, I abandoned my first intention, and enlisted."

Fane stood up, leaning his arm against the chimney-piece, his head upon his hand, deep in thought. "Certainly," he said to himself, "Langley is innocent of the forgery—and I think I see who is guilty—now, to prove it is the point."

"Was there any one present when you gave the check to Seager ?" he asked.

Levitt paused for a minute to think.

"I'm not sure," he replied, "'twas so long ago ; but I rather think Mounteney was present."

"And knew the amount of the check ?" asked Fane.

"Probably," returned Levitt—"indeed, I should say, certainly, if he was present, as I rather fancy he was. But why do you ask ?"

Fane, however, waived this question ; it could answer no purpose, at present, to show Langley the suspicion he lay under. Supper appearing at the moment enabled him to change the subject.

"Your health, Durham," said Langley ; "long may you enjoy my uncle's favour, which you deserve better than I did. By Jupiter !" he added, setting

down his glass, "I had almost forgotten the flavour of champagne. It is long since I tasted it, and 'twill, probably, be yet longer before I taste it again."

"You have told me nothing of your plans for the future," said Durham.

"They are hardly definite enough to talk about; but I'm not used to despond. My one clear purpose is to leave England. Since I left the service, I have found how difficult it is to make, unassisted, the first step in the ascent of life. Now, I consider myself rather a sharp fellow, Durham, as fellows go. I am willing to turn my hand to any earthly thing it is capable of, in an honest way; and a man who, though naturally impatient, yet performs three years' service in the lower ranks of the army with credit, has some title to trust his own temper and perseverance. Yet I've been for these—let me see, how many weeks is it since I sold my last sketch?—three, I think—hovering on the confines of absolute penury."

"Good God!" exclaimed Fane. "My dear fellow!"

"Fact," said Levitt, with a laugh. "So I resolved to try what virtue there was in a stout arm and a gay heart, in a country like Canada or Australia. But the passage-money—there was the rub. I've been trying to raise it, as I came along, by selling sketches to booksellers, but that hardly kept me in bread and cheese. Arriving here, however, I found a theatrical

company in want of a scene-painter. I offered myself, was approved of, and tolerably well paid ; and four or five mornings ago, when their walking gentleman was sick, I volunteered to supply his place. Old Cavendish the manager gave me a benefit to-night, which has put a few pounds in my pocket, and the day after to-morrow I start for the New World."

"There is only one little point left unaccounted for in your narrative," said Fane, smiling. "Frewenham is not exactly in the road to any point of embarkation for Canada, or Australia either ; and you have not explained what brought you here."

He fixed his eyes on Levitt, who, spite of his efforts to look indifferent, coloured deeply.

"I'm a confounded fool, Durham—I believe that's undeniable," he said. "And yet, I'm not ashamed to say that I came so far out of my way to take a last look at a woman. Such a woman, Durham—ah, you must be, as I've been, beneath the very heel of fortune, and habituated to the sense of appearing to others in a false light, to know the true value of a charming woman's sympathy. If I had met her anywhere, or at any period of my life, I should have preferred her to all the world—but circumstances have made me positively adore her. I would not present myself again before her for the world—that could

answer no good purpose—but I could not deny myself one last glimpse of Orelia.”

“Though I smile,” said Fane, “don’t think, my dear fellow, ’tis at your devotion. On the contrary, I honour you for it. I was merely paying tribute to my own penetration at having guessed what brought you here.”

Hereupon there ensued a conversation on the subject of love, its exacting and engrossing nature, its dreams, its power to excite, its anxieties, and the astonishing absurdities which even sensible people commit, without any shame or compunction, under its influence. And as this was a subject more interesting to the two interlocutors than to whole-hearted, devil-may-care people like you and me, reader, who are not yet, heaven be praised, utterly hoodwinked, and have no occasion to pluck cherry lips and neatly-turned ankles out of our eyes in order to see clearly—and as, moreover, it has been touched upon by one or two previous writers, we will merely mention in this place that the two cousins seemed wonderfully unanimous in their opinions and feelings, and separated for the night with a very strong regard for each other.

CHAPTER L.

NEXT morning Fane wrote a note to Orelia, to say that he wished to hear from her how Lady Lee had borne the restoration of Julius to her arms—for that he would not commit the sacrilege of intruding upon her on a day that ought to be sacred to other feelings than those his presence could inspire.

“I slept so little, and so lightly, last night” (wrote Orelia, in reply, after describing how she had deposited Julius, undiscovered, by his mother’s side), “that I was easily roused by what I thought was a cry from Hester. I sat up in bed and listened in silence—then I stole to her door, and heard such a kind of murmuring within as a dove might make over its young. I entered. Hester was hanging over Julius, apparently not quite certain whether she waked or slept—indeed, she seemed to think it a vivid dream, for she stared at me as I entered, and passed her hand confusedly across her eyes. I sat

down on the bed, and whispered to her that 'twas all real, and if she would lie quite still and composed, I would tell her the whole of the story as far as I knew it.

"You did right not to come to-day. She is still a little bewildered—and was quite so till she had a good cry. For some little time she did what I'm sure you never heard her do—she talked nonsense. As for the cause of all these tears, he seems tolerably unconcerned. He submitted to our embraces this morning as coolly as if he had only been away a week, and is now busy, dressed in his Highland costume (for there are no clothes of his here), in making acquaintance with Moloch. This helps to compose Hester, and she is now able to comprehend her happiness—to-morrow she will be radiant.

"Come to-morrow as early as you like."

This note was brought by Mr Payne; and Fane, after he had read it, told that gentleman he had seen Langley, and was persuaded of his innocence in the matter of the forgery. He mentioned Seager as the person who had received the check, and Mr Payne at once remembered that to be the name of the person who had presented it, and who had excited no suspicion of anything irregular, as this was not the first that had been paid to him. Fane also told what he had learnt from Lady Lee of the charge of swindling

now pending against Seager, and of the additional probability thus afforded that he was the delinquent. Mr Payne promptly adopted this view of the case, and proposed that he should go instantly to town to consult a legal adviser on the matter, and, if necessary, have an interview with Seager himself. "You see," he said, "that what we want, in this instance, is, not to prosecute or recover, but simply to establish Langley's innocence; and if, by confessing, he can avoid a prosecution, perhaps we may, without difficulty, get Seager to admit his guilt."

After Mr Payne had departed, Fane spent the rest of the day in investigating Mr Holmes's account of the abduction of Julius. It really appeared that Bagot was the instigator of it—and, moreover, that the Colonel had intended to restore Julius so soon as the conclusion of the trial should have removed the original inducement for concealing him, which was to obtain funds wherewith to meet the trial.

Lady Lee was, as Orelia had prophesied, all radiant when Fane next saw her, and looked altogether so cheerful and charming that he experienced a sudden impulse to embrace her; and, not seeing any just cause or impediment, had already, with that view, put his arm round her waist, when she stooped, and, snatching Julius from the ground, held him before her as a shield. Julius, being fond of Fane, immedi-

ately clung round his neck, and thus covered any little discomfiture he might naturally have felt at having his intention defeated.

This placing of Julius between the lovers involved a kind of metaphor ; for Lady Lee reminded Fane that, though they might have dispensed with Bagot's consent on mere pecuniary grounds, yet now, when Julius's interests were again at stake, it was imperative to obtain it.

Fane, who had in fact come rushing into Lady Lee's presence with the full intention of pressing for immediate union, now that her mourning was thus happily at an end, was fairly staggered by this consideration, which he had in his eagerness quite overlooked. But though he could have found resolution to submit to what was inevitable, it was not in his nature to be patient while any alternative remained. First, he would go instantly, seek out Bagot, and demand the consent—would go down on his knees for it, if necessary, professing himself ready for any amount of baseness and sycophancy to propitiate the potent Colonel. But Lady Lee, feeling that Bagot might possibly vent the anger she knew him to entertain against Fane in some coarse insult, told the latter her reasons for thinking the Colonel was not to be propitiated. Then he urged that if Bagot could not be cajoled, he might be threatened or bought—that

a hint of exposure in the business of the abduction might bring him to terms.

This certainly seemed feasible ; but this hope was put to flight by a letter from Mr Payne, announcing that, arriving in town on the last day of the trial, with the intention of seeing Seager, he found both him and Bagot fled, and the latter had been traced to France. This was a terrible stroke, affecting so powerfully as it did the interests both of Fane and Langley. And as this brings us to the point of Mr Seager's flight from town, we will now follow that gentleman in his career.

CHAPTER LI.

SEAGER, fancying himself dogged at the railway terminus on the day of his flight from London, took his ticket for the station beyond that where he intended to alight, to avoid detection. At Frewenham he left the train and repaired to an inn, a second-rate one, which he had selected as a less dangerous abode than the principal hotel.

Keeping up his disguise, he spent two whole days (precious days to him) in walking about Larches for an opportunity of speaking to Lady Lee. Fane, or Mr Payne, or Fillett, were for ever there, one or other of them, and it might be fatal to his plans for any of them to discover him. He read in the papers, with a good deal of amusement, the account of the late trial, and was particularly diverted with the paragraph at the close which announced that the prisoners had forfeited their bail, and were supposed to be at large on the Continent. On the third day, however,

he saw the coast clear, and taking off his wig and false mustache behind a hedge, he buttoned his great-coat across the splendour beneath it, and, looking like himself, walked boldly up to the cottage and rang the bell.

"Give that to Lady Lee," he said to the servant who opened the door, "and say I wait for an answer."

When Lady Lee opened the note, she read a request from Mr Seager "to grant him a short interview, on a subject *of the last importance*" (these words being underlined).

"Something about the affairs of the wretched Colonel, I suppose," she said to herself; "shall I admit him? Surely Bagot has forfeited all right to my assistance." Her eye fell on Julius, and her heart softened. After all, Bagot had done her no irreparable injury. "Take the child away," she said, "and then admit the person who waits."

Mr Seager, in full possession of all his brazen assurance, was ushered in. Lady Lee's look was quite composed, and there was nothing like grief in her aspect. "She's got over the boy's loss pretty quickly," thought Seager.

"Time is precious, my lady," he said, when he had seated himself; "you'll excuse me if I come at once to the point, and cut the matter short."

"As short as you please, sir," said Lady Lee.

This rather put him out, but he recovered himself as he went on.

"Perhaps, when you know what I came about, I shall be more welcome. What if I know of something which nearly concerns you, and which you would give much to hear?"

Lady Lee sat upright on the sofa, and her face assumed a look of anxiety. "What can it be?" she said to herself; and then aloud, "Go on, sir."

"I must explain that I am peculiarly situated just now, my lady—very peculiarly indeed. I'm leaving the country, and my resources are running very low. This must be my excuse for attaching a condition to the revealing of this secret;—in fact, I am compelled to make a matter of business of it. You can command a good sum, I dare say, such as would be a vast thing to me, without any inconvenience to yourself."

"But the nature of your information, sir?—the nature of it?" said Lady Lee, her curiosity excited to an extreme degree.

"You see," said Seager, "you may not have the sum I should require in the house; but I'll take your note of hand, or I.O.U. I know you'd be honourable, my lady."

"The nature of it?" repeated Lady Lee, anxiously.

"Hem," said Mr Seager, clearing his throat, and

muttering to himself. "It does look rather heartless, but it can't be helped. In a word, you had a son who passes for dead—what if I could give tidings of him?"

Lady Lee gave a sigh of relief, and fell back on the sofa. She saw his error. Mr Seager took it for a sign of agitation, and went on.

"You'll say, of course, Prove your words? Very well; do you know this handwriting?" He rose, and held a letter before her eyes.

"Perfectly," said Lady Lee; "it is Colonel Lee's."

"Well, read a line or two of it," said Seager, opening it so that one paragraph was visible.

She read—"Hester, we shall never meet again, and I will repair an injury I have done you. Your boy is not dead, he——"

"There," said Mr Seager, refolding the letter, "that will satisfy you of my good faith. Now, if I give this, containing full information of your son's whereabouts, what will you give?"

"But," said Lady Lee, "have you any right to withhold such information?"

"That's not the question," said Seager; "we won't talk about rights. I've no time for humbug. In a word, name your figure, or else I put the letter in my pocket, and in six hours I shall be in France. Speak out, and be liberal!"

At this moment there was a fumbling at the handle of the door.

"Send 'em away," said Mr Seager ; "this matter must be between you and me."

Lady Lee knew who the intruder was, and going to the door opened it, and admitted Julius.

Mr Seager fell a pace back, crying out, "My God ! you've found him, then."

Lady Lee led Julius to the sofa with something of a smile on her face, and seated him on her lap.

"Well, sir," she said to Seager, "you forgot to mention the price you set upon a mother's feelings."

"Damnation !" muttered Seager ; "it's no go. I'll be off. Shall I try to get some money out of her for Lee? No, she wouldn't trust me with it now, and time's precious. My secret is forestalled," he said aloud, with a brazen grin. "I'm sorry we couldn't have made a bargain for it. But you needn't say you have seen me, my lady—promise you won't," he added. "There's been no harm done, you know."

Lady Lee rose and rang the bell. Seager made off towards the door, opened it, and turned round. "Don't mention you saw me," he repeated ; "'twill do no good."

He was hurrying off, cursing his ill luck, and resolving to continue his flight instantly, when he ran full tilt, in the passage, against the police officer

whom he had evaded at the London station. His delay in the attempt to extort money from Lady Lee had been fatal to his plan of escape. The policeman addressed him by name, and told him he was his prisoner. Seager started back, with an exclamation, followed by a muttered curse.

"Hush!" he said, "don't speak loud. How did you find me?"

"Got on your scent last night, sir," said the policeman, "and have been dodging you all the morning. I saw you take off your wig behind the hedge, and knew you in a minute."

Again Seager began a string of curses in a low tone. Presently he drew forth a pocket-book. "Come," he said, "you'll get nothing by my capture—what shall we say, now, for letting me slip? Nobody need ever know you found me."

The policeman smiled as he put the offered notes aside.

"Stuff!" said Seager. "Every man has his price. Why shouldn't you turn a penny when you can?"

He was still pressing his point, and the officer was getting impatient, when the front door near which they stood opened, and Fane entered from the garden.

"What! Seager!" he cried, on seeing that gentleman—"the very man I want above all others. What

brought you here ! and who is this ? ” he asked, looking at the policeman.

A short explanation from the latter put Fane in possession of the facts.

“ Be so good as to bring your prisoner in here,” said Fane, opening the door of a small room. “ I won’t detain you long, and you cannot object to the delay, as it may result in a fresh charge against Mr Seager.”

Seager affected to laugh at this, but felt rather alarmed, nevertheless. His capture had upset all his calculations, and momentarily shaken his habitual confidence in himself.

“ Please to attend to this conversation,” Fane said to the police officer. “ In the first place, I must tell you, Mr Seager, that your former victim, my cousin Langley Levitt, is now in Frewenham, and that Mr Payne is now in London, investigating the circumstances of the forgery of a certain check on his bank.”

Seager turned pale. “ Well,” he said, “ what then ? ”

“ That check you presented for payment,” said Fane.

“ Ay,” said Seager ; “ but that doesn’t prove I forged it, or knew it was forged. Can you prove that ? ”

“I think we can. A person was present when Langley gave it you, and the amount of it was then known. I give you credit for cleverness in your calculations. You knew Langley was resolved to disappear from his family and the world—you calculated that when the forgery should be discovered the matter would be hushed up—and that, while Langley passed as the forger, the fraud would never be known. But now that he has reappeared, and is in communication with his friends, the matter must come to light.”

Mr Seager sullenly shrugged his shoulders. “Well,” said he, “I’m in a hole, and no mistake. I can’t show play for it, since this gentleman has bagged me” (looking at the policeman). “You must take your own course. But,” he added in a low tone, intended exclusively for Fane’s ear, “I can’t understand your interest in detecting me. Haven’t you taken Levitt’s place with your uncle?”

Fane nodded.

“And if Levitt is restored to favour, you will lose by it?”

“In a worldly point of view, yes,” returned Fane.

“Well, then,” said Mr Seager, “your line is plain enough. You can say you believe (of course, with great regret), but still, you’re compelled to believe, that your cousin was the forger. Your uncle takes

your word for it, and drops the matter—Langley goes to the devil—and you remain sole favourite and heir, don't you see? So much for that," whispered Mr Seager, with the air of a man who has put his case incontrovertibly.

Fane smiled as he looked steadily at Seager. "You are a clever rascal, certainly," he said, "in a small way. You are well acquainted with your own side of human nature, but beyond that you're in the dark. Dismissing, then, this new and practical view of the case, allow me to offer a suggestion. Our principal object, of course, is justice to Langley rather than revenge on you. A prosecution, though it would probably lead to your conviction, especially now that your character is blasted, would require time, while your confession would at once answer the purpose."

"But what should I get by confessing?" asked Seager.

"Nothing," said Fane. "A bribe would impair the value of your admissions. But I promise you this, that if you confess, I will use what interest I possess to stop all proceedings against you on account of the forgery. Now," said he, setting writing materials before him, "take your choice. Silence and prosecution, or confession and impunity."

Mr Seager pondered for a minute; but he was too

shrewd not to see where his advantage lay. He had nothing to lose by confessing—his character was already gone, and could scarcely suffer farther, while a conviction for the forgery might entail transportation. After a very short interval of consideration, he took up a pen. "I'm ready," he said; "I'll do it in the penitent style if you like. Prickings of conscience, desire to render tardy reparation, and all that."

"No," said Fane, "it shall be simple and genuine; allow me to dictate it."

This he accordingly did, setting forth—first, that the confession was quite voluntary, and, secondly, admitting the forgery and the circumstances that led to its commission. Seager signed this, and the sergeant and Fane witnessed it, and the latter now desired the officer to remove his prisoner. Mr Seager nodded to Fane, and winked facetiously as he left the room, made a face at the policeman, who preceded him out, and then departed to undergo his sentence.

CHAPTER LII.

FANE had already confided Langley's history to Lady Lee, and he now showed her the testimony of his innocence, and consulted her as to the best course to be pursued.

They agreed it would be best to say nothing, either to Langley or Orelia, of the matter, until Mr Payne should have apprised Mr Levitt of his nephew's innocence, and effected a reconciliation. Fane did not in the least doubt that his uncle would be eager to extend forgiveness; but a delay of a day or two would be trifling, and the pleasure of a first meeting between the lovers would be greatly enhanced by the removal, beforehand, of every obstacle to their happiness.

Mr Payne, coming down from town to report his ill success in the attempt to discover Seager, was agreeably surprised by Fane's news. He posted off without delay to show the document to his friend Mr

Levitt, and, a couple of days afterwards, wrote to tell Fane that the news had produced the best effect on his uncle's health, that he was eager to embrace Langley, and that they would be down together in person on the following day.

Fane was seated on a sofa near the fire (it was a cold morning) whispering into Lady Lee's willing yet averted ear, numerous reckless and persuasive arguments for an immediate union. What were riches to them while they were thus kept apart? He, for his part, would, he said, dig cheerfully all day, could he be sure of finding her ready to give zest to his pottage, cheerfulness to his fireside, when he came home. Let Bagot take her income; and as for Julius, they would take him and flee to some remote corner of Europe, there to abide till the Colonel relented, or had drunk himself to death. Lady Lee smiled at all this display of love, but shook her head. He, Durham, must be patient, she said.

"Miss Payne," called out Fane to Orelia, "be on my side." Orelia was sitting in a bay window designing a picture. She seldom came near the fire, and never felt cold. "I am telling Hester that we ought to break through the cobwebs that sunder us—scatter the filthy lucre to the winds—snatch up Julius out of reach of the ogre Bagot, and try if the

wings of Eros cannot shield us against the hardest fate."

"Hester has given up much for you already, Captain Fane," said the austere Orelia. "Your coming has upset the rarest plan; and now I am left to walk the path alone."

"What was the plan?" inquired Fane.

"We were going, Orelia and I," said Lady Lee, with an irreverent smile, "to daff the world aside—to devote ourselves to good works—and we actually set out on our thorny path; but I see now, that if we had continued as we begun, casting as we did so many glances backward on the vanities of the past, we should, if justice had been administered now as in the days of the patriarchs, have both been made pillars of salt."

"Speak for yourself, my dear," returned Orelia, sharpening her pencil and her tone. "I, at least, was quite resolute to persevere, and am so still."

"Perhaps an equally unworthy excuse, as that which Hester pleads for changing her mind, may yet avail you," suggested Fane.

"Never," returned Orelia, with the greatest firmness.

"Do you think she really doesn't care for Langley?" whispered Fane to Lady Lee.

Lady Lee looked towards her friend with an

affectionate smile. "She's an odd girl," she said, "and 'tisn't easy to ascertain her feelings till they are strongly excited."

"I'll prove them, now," said Fane, rising, and going to a portfolio in the room, and taking thence a drawing. "Miss Payne," he said, "you are always ready to recognise skill in art. See, here is a sketch I lately rescued from the oblivion of a bookseller's shop; what do you think of it?"

Orelia took it. No one knew better than she the peculiar touch and bold outline. She gazed at it earnestly for a minute—looked up wonderingly and inquiringly at Fane; but, meeting a peculiar searching glance, she lowered her eyes, and coloured violently.

"If you like it, and would wish others of the same sort, I think I could procure you some," he said.

Orelia laid down the drawing—glanced aside—again looked at it—then turned her eye uneasily to Lady Lee, who was smilingly watching her. "How very heartless to trifle with me so," thought Orelia, "particularly of Hester; but I'll show them they can't move me. I won't be their sport."

So she stoically resumed her employment, feeling very fidgety nevertheless. In her agitation, she shaded a cloud in her sky with sepia instead of the

proper grey tint—dashed a brushful of water at it—smudged her whole sky irretrievably, as if an eccentric-looking thunderstorm were brewing—rubbed a hole in the paper in getting it out, and threw down her brush with an expression of impatience.

“He’s a very promising artist the person who did this sketch,” said the unfeeling Fane to Lady Lee. “I feel quite interested in him.” Lady Lee shook her head while she smiled at him. She saw her impetuous friend was getting quite excited. “Serve her right for her hypocrisy,” whispered Fane. “I don’t pity her in the least. They must be in Frewenham by this time,” he added, looking at his watch; “and, allowing an hour for the interview between them and Langley, they will be here to lunch.”

Orelia’s ears were on the stretch to catch any further information, which, however, she would have died rather than ask for.

But the only further talk on the subject was when Fane asked Lady Lee “if she didn’t think it would be a kind act to take this poor artist by the hand, and give him an opening to make his way?”

“Poor artist! Take him by the hand, indeed!” thought Orelia, with a glance of great scorn; and indeed she would hardly have been content to vent her indignation in glances, had not Miss Fillett just then entered, and changed the current of their dis-

course. Kitty's manner was excited, and her eyes were red.

"Ho, my lady," cried she, "here's Noble have come, and he wish to see your ladyship."

"Noble!" cried her ladyship; "did they not say he was with Colonel Lee?"

"He was, my lady; but, ho! Colonel Lee"—here Fillett choked. "Harry'll tell you himself: come in, Noble, and speak to my lady."

Noble, who was waiting at the door, entered, and made his bow.

"You come from the Colonel—you have a letter for me," said Lady Lee, holding out her hand for the expected missive.

"No, my lady," said Noble.

"Speak up, Harry," said Miss Fillett, with a sob.

"We started for France, me and the Colonel," said Noble, clearing his throat; "and as soon as ever he got ashore, he was took ill in the same way as he was in London. The doctors said 'twas owing to his not being able to keep nothing on his stomach on the passage across—brandy nor nothing—for the water was very rough."

"He is ill, then," said Lady Lee; "not seriously, I trust."

"My lady, he's gone!" cried Fillett.

"Dead?" said Lady Lee.

"Dead," said Noble. "He got quite wild when he was took to the hotel; and after we got him to bed, he did himself a mischief, by jumping out of window while he was out of his mind. When we picked him up he couldn't speak."

"And he died so?" cried Lady Lee.

"Not immediate," said Noble, speaking in a deep low voice, and keeping his eyes fixed firmly on Lady Lee; "he got his speech again for a little, and knowed me. 'This is the finish, Noble,' says he, 'and I'm glad of it; I wouldn't have consented to live.' Them was his last sensible words. He talked afterwards, to be sure, but not to know what he was saying. He appeared to be in the belief that he was back at the Heronry. He talked of the horses there, in particular of old Coverly, who died of gripes better than six years ago."

Lady Lee put her handkerchief to her eyes. She had a tear for poor Bagot. Death sponged away the recollection of his animosity towards her, and she remembered only the old familiar face and rough good-nature. "The poor Colonel," she said; "the poor, poor Colonel! And his remains, Noble?"

"There was two gentlemen as was friends of his in the town; Sir John Barrett was one of 'em. They was very sorry; they ordered everything, and went to the funeral; and though it warn't altogether in

the style I could wish—no hearse nor mourners—yet it was done respectable.”

Lady Lee wept silently, and Fane thought her tears became her. Both of them probably remembered that the only obstacle to their union was removed by Bagot's death, but the taste of both was too fine to allow such a thought to be expressed that day in any way. “Leave me now, Noble,” she said; “I will hear more from you another time.”

Kitty—who, when Noble reached the catastrophe, had been seized with an hysterical weeping that sounded like a succession of small sneezes—opened the door for him, and followed him out. Noble walked down stairs before her, not turning his head nor speaking.

“Harry,” said Kitty, with a sniff, when he reached the hall—“Harry!”

Noble turned, and surveyed her austerely.

“Ho, Harry,” said Kitty, “haven't you got a word for a friend?”

“Yes,” said Harry, “for a friend I've got more than a word.”

“I thought we were friends, Noble,” said Miss Fillett, taking up the corner of her apron and examining it.

“There's people in the world one can't be friends with, however a body may wish it,” replied Noble.

"And am I one of that sort, Harry?" said Kitty, with a sidelong look. "Am I, Harry?"

"Yes," said Harry, "yes, you be. Look here! I'd have cut off my arm to do you any good" (striking it with the edge of his hand). "You know that very well, but I can't stand your ways—no, I can't, and I ain't agoing to any more."

"What ways do you mean?" said Miss Fillett innocently; "I'm sorry my ways isn't pleasant, Harry."

"Pleasant!" said Harry; "they can be pleasant enough when you like; but when you drive a man a'most crazy, and make him wish to cut his fellow-creeturs' throats, and his own afterwards, do you think that's pleasant?"

Kitty at this tossed up her head, and sniffed with an injured air. "If I give you such thoughts as them, Mr Noble, of course 'tis better to have nothing to say to me. I wasn't aware my conversation made people murderers."

"Look here," said Noble; "I don't say I like you the worse for it. No, cuss it! I like you the better—that's the cussed part of it; but what I mean is, that I ain't going to be tormented and kept awake at nights, and to lose my meals as well as my sleep, and to go a-hating my fellow-creeturs, just upon account of your philanderings; and the best way is not

to care who you philander with, and to leave you to keep company with them as can stand having the life worried out of 'em better than I can."

"I'm glad you've spoke out, Noble," said Kitty, who spied relenting in his look, and who kept up the injured air. "I didn't know I was such a rogue and a villain as I'm made out to be by you. If I'd wished to slay or hang somebody, you couldn't have spoke worse of me."

"Well," said Noble, "I didn't mean to vex you, though you've vexed me many a time. I was only saying why it was I warn't going to be fooled any longer. Come, I'll shake hands with you."

"Ho, what! take the hand of a young person that wishes people to cut other people's throats! I wonder at you," said Miss Fillett, allowing him to get only the tip of her little finger into his hand.

"Come," said the unhappy victim of female arts, "say you won't torment me any more with talking and smiling at fellows, and I'll be as fond of you as ever. Look here; here's some French gloves that I smuggled over, and was going to put into your band-box without your knowing who they'd come from. Let me try 'em on, Kitty."

Miss Fillett glanced aside at the packet displayed in his hand. "What lovely colours!" thought Kitty; "that lilac *is* genteel, and so is the straw

colour. He never could have chose 'em himself." But she still feigned displeasure, and Mr Noble's desire for reconciliation was becoming proportionably ardent, when the pair were disturbed by a carriage driving up to the door, and made off to terminate the interview in the kitchen.

The carriage in question contained those whom Fane expected—viz., Mr Payne, Mr Levitt, and Langley. The latter helped out his uncle (who appeared to be in much better health) with a care and affection that showed they were entirely reconciled. At the first meeting Mr Levitt had attempted to maintain his cynical demeanour, and was highly disgusted with himself, afterwards, to remember how signally he had failed. "Till I witnessed that meeting," said Mr Payne afterwards to Fane, "I had no idea how much your uncle loved that boy."

Fane was looking out of the window, and saw them approach. "Here they are," he said—"your papa, Miss Payne, and my uncle; and I see my cousin Langley is with them. Have you ever heard me speak of him? I think you'll like him."

"Do you, indeed!" said Orelia stiffly; for she had by no means recovered her temper since the drawings had been produced by Fane, and was not disposed to be particularly amiable to her new guests.

Mr Payne entered first and kissed Orelia.

"I bring an old and a young friend of mine, my dear. This is Mr Levitt, and—where's Langley? Come along, Langley."

Langley stepped forward and took the young lady's hand.

"Onslow!" cried Orelia.

"Yes," said the ex-dragoon, in a low voice, and with his well-known smile, "Onslow and Langley Levitt."

"You didn't know, sir," said Fane to his uncle, of the fatted calf we had ready for your prodigal nephew. He and Orelia are old friends—I think I may add, something more than old friends."

"You don't say so!" said Mr Levitt, pressing forward and taking both Orelia's hands in his. "My dear," he said, watching Langley's and her agitation, "I believe you are going to put the finishing stroke to my happiness, and I shall like you better even than I expected."

"Why, God bless me!" cried Mr Payne, "I never heard a word of this. The monkey has been extremely sly."

Orelia, now a little paler than usual, was regarding her lover with steady eyes.

"I shall never call you anything but Onslow," she said; and she kept her word.

Mr Levitt was in every respect satisfied with the choice of his nephews, as indeed he had good reason to be. What did the man expect, I wonder ! He was almost as impatient as the young men to put all future disappointment out of the power of fate by immediate marriage ; and as the ladies did not offer a very spirited resistance, he had his way.

Accordingly the courtship was short, and principally remarkable for a revolution that took place in the opinions of Lady Lee. Formerly, she had been accustomed, in the moments of dignified cynicism which occasionally visited her, to be very unsparing in her contempt for the ordinary forms of love-making ; kissing, in particular, she considered to be a practice even beneath contempt, from its extreme silliness—fit, she would say, only for children—an opinion she had occasionally communicated to Sir Joseph when his fondness became troublesome.

This, however, with many graver theories, had been upset since she fell in love with Fane. The first time he kissed her it evaporated in an uncommon flutter of not unpleasant emotion, which puzzled her ladyship the more because she perfectly remembered that a kiss from Sir Joseph had never caused her to feel any greater agitation than if she had flattened her nose against a pane of glass.

However, to do justice to her consistency, she

didn't abandon the theory at the first defeat ; but, taking counsel with herself, and fortifying her mind anew with reasoning on the subject, the next time he offered to be so childish, she repelled the attempt with a great deal of dignity. Fane, who had a theory of his own on such matters (whether the result of intuition or experience, I can't say), and knew what he was about perfectly, very wisely let her alone for a time. Her ladyship grew quite fidgety ; and though Fane had never been more brilliant, she paid very little attention to what he said, and, when he only shook hands with her at parting, felt half inclined to quarrel with him. After this, Fane never met with any resistance ; on the contrary, not content with one of these silly proceedings at meeting and parting, her ladyship would sometimes manoeuvre, artfully enough, for an extra or surplus salute. Such is the singular superiority of practice over theory.

Very shocking and humiliating to the philosopher and student of human nature is the fact, that these two intellectual beings, with their high imaginations and their cultivated tastes, should sometimes, during their courtship, demean themselves with no greater regard for their dignity than a redfaced dairymaid and her sweetheart Robin. But it is true, nevertheless ; and if Fane discovered a fresh charm in his

goddess, it was in the naïve pleasure with which she condescended (at least he thought it condescension) to express her fondness. And Langley, for the same reason, was doubly delighted with the warmth which the outwardly majestic Orelia did not scruple to display towards the man to whom she had given her heart. This is all I shall say on this part of the subject, as courtship is of the class of performances which afford much more satisfaction to the *dramatis personæ* than the audience.

They were married, these two pairs, in the church which Hester's father had formerly served; and afterwards Fane and she set off for the Heronry, where they were quite alone (for Rosa and the Curate had, before their coming, gone to take possession of the vicarage in Mr Levitt's gift, which Fane had formerly offered to Josiah, and which he did not again refuse), while Langley and Orelia stayed at the cottage.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

IT is a vile practice that of winding up a story with a marriage, as if the sole object of all that inkshed was to put a couple of characters to bed; and I wonder the rigid propriety of our novel writers and readers doesn't revolt at it. Besides, considering the matter on artistic grounds, it is not satisfactory to check, by the chilling word *Finis*, the ardour of the reader, just excited to a high pitch at the spectacle of the hero and heroine sinking into each other's arms. It is like quitting the opera, as the curtain falls on a splendid group, tinted with rose light, while the whole strength of the company sings a chorus; and going splashing home through the rain to a bachelor's lodging, where the maid has let the fire out and forgot the matches, and you have to stumble to bed punchless and oysterless in the dark.

A year passed, after the marriages aforesaid, and a party, including many of our principal characters, was assembled in the little church of Lanscote to celebrate another wedding.

Josiah was the officiating clergyman ; he had come partly for that purpose, partly to perform another ceremony. The persons to be joined together in holy matrimony, on this occasion, were Rosa and Bruce.

The principal agent in effecting this had been the old antiquary Mr Titcherly. That lover of inscriptions had now become himself the subject of a tombstone ; and having, as aforesaid, great regard for Bruce, and having no kindred of his own to bequeath to, had in his will, after making ample provision for the future editions of his great work on the antiquities of Doddington, left the rest of his property, amounting to about £4000, to Rosa, on condition she married Bruce ; and this, together with the solicitations of his wife, who had been gained over to the other party by Bruce's enthusiastic description of Rosa's excellencies, had melted the heart of that splendid old fellow the dean of Trumpington. That reverend personage was now present at the wedding, together with his wife, and Dr Macvino, who had dined the night before at the Heronry, and pronounced the port excellent.

Fane gave away the little magnificent bride, half hidden in an ample rich veil of white lace sent by Orelia, which cost nobody knows how much. Bruce was in his dragoon uniform. His mustache had flourished much in the last year, and Rosa thought him handsomer than Apollo. Langley was there, and Mr Oates appeared as groom's man, and the two Clumbers as bridesmaids.

The ceremony was over, the bridegroom duly shaken by the hand, the bride, all blush and bloom and smile, duly kissed. The Curate, leaving the altar, took up his position beside the antique font, and the group following him, and ranging themselves round, lost the gorgeous hues which the one painted window above the altar of Lanscote Church had shed on them during the marriage ceremony; and, as the Curate began the baptismal service, they stood in the cheerful light of the morning sun.

The principal personage of this second ceremony had been held, during the first one, in the arms of Miss Fillett in the background. Kitty, who looked rather staid and matronly, in consequence of having been married to Mr Noble a few weeks before, and who had hitherto, in this new capacity, acquitted herself entirely to Harry's satisfaction, dandled the infant in the most approved fashion. "Have done, Master Julius," said Kitty, giving that young gentle-

man a good shake as he attempted to rush up the pulpit stairs. "Can't you behave for a minute, not even when they are a-baptising of your little sister?"

The preliminary part of the service being read, the infant was handed to Josiah. He took it gently in his arms, and looked down on its small face, where he saw the rudiments of Hester's features. The service was for a moment at a stand-still, and a tear was seen to drop on the child's cheek as he bent over it—the first holy water that touched its face that morning. "Good fellow, old Josey," thought Fane, as he noticed it. "Poor dear Josiah!" mentally ejaculated Hester, with a truer though secret knowledge of the source of his emotion.

The dean of Trumpington hemmed impatiently—he wanted his breakfast; and the sympathetic Doctor Macvino, going behind Josiah, jogged his arm. The Curate started from his reverie, and looked around. "Name this child," he said, proceeding with the ritual.

"Rosa Orelia," answered the bride, who officiated as one godmother, while Trephina Clumber was proxy for Orelia (who was detained at home by private business of her own).

The christening was finished without further delay.

Then the assembly passed forth from the old ivy-covered porch, and, amid the admiration and applause of the inhabitants of Lanscote, entered their carriages to drive back to the Heronry.

The breakfast was pronounced by Dr Macvino, by no means an incompetent judge, a magnificent affair. Speeches were made afterwards—one jocosely cynical, and sprinkled with puns, by Mr Levitt; one gay, fluent, and agreeable, from Captain O'Reilly, a fresh-coloured man, with white teeth, who had succeeded Tindal in command of the detachment, and who had practised popular oratory at various contested elections; one rich and oily, delivered *ore rotundo*, by Dr Macvino, with some others.

The newly-married pair had driven off; the guests had dispersed; even the Curate had, in despite of the urgent entreaties of Hester and Durham, inexorably departed. Fane and his wife were alone together in the library.

"I told you yesterday, Hester," he said, leaning over the back of her chair, "of the opening into public life now offered me. My answer must be written to-night."

Hester looked uneasy. "You will refuse it, Durham, won't you?"

"I think not, Hester."

"I thought we had been very happy this year past. I knew I had, and I flattered myself you had ; but you are weary of me ;" and, as she spoke, the first sad tears since her marriage came into her eyes.

"I swear to you," he said, removing the tears in the readiest way that occurred to him—"I swear to you that I would rather live 'the past year over again than the best ten others of my existence. But what right have I to continue this life of pleasant uselessness, when I may exert myself?"

"Uselessness !" said his wife ; "do you call being my companion and instructor uselessness?"

"You have a new companion now in that young Christian of yours, whom I hear squalling," said Fane ; "she will prevent you from missing me. As to the instruction part, I have learnt as much as I could teach for the life of me. If I have widened your mind, you have no less refined mine ; and, could I but rid myself of a certain uneasy conviction that we are both of us accountable beings, I would contentedly let the world slide for ever as softly and easily as now. But is this unproductive interchange of sentiment, however elevated and refined, fit to be the sole occupation of a man who can be up and doing?"

Hester sighed. "You force me," said she, "to look at a truth I would willingly shut my eyes to. One other year would not tire you, Durham ; put it off for one—only one."

"But the opportunity would be gone," said Fane. "Come, make up your mind to it, and you will acknowledge next year that, in watching my career, applauding my success, if I meet with it, soothing my disappointments when they find me, you have new and worthier occupation."

Hester disputed no farther ; he wrote the letter of acceptance ; and next year she acknowledged that she was growing more ambitious for him than he was for himself.

The Curate did not remain long in the living to which Mr Levitt had presented him. An incident that occurred in the second year of his incumbency gave him a disgust at the place. A female parishioner, of tolerably mature years, made a dead set at Josiah. She had experiences to impart ; she took share in his parochial matters ; she even studied botany ; and the unsuspecting Josiah was the only person who didn't penetrate her designs on his heart. When the fair one found these would certainly fail, she brought an action for breach of promise ; and the evidence being about as strong as that in the cele-

brated case of Bardell *versus* Pickwick, the jury, as Englishmen and fathers, of course found for the plaintiff, with £200 damages. About that time Dean Bruce, in consideration of the family connection, managed to get Josiah elected canon of the cathedral; and in course of time he became a prebend. He has a good house and capital garden; his study is one of the pleasantest rooms to be found anywhere, with a cloistered air about it, the pointed window all hung with ivy, looking on the great window of the cathedral, and on one of the buttressed towers. He has an ancient married housekeeper, who looks faithfully after his comforts; he entertains his friends nobly when they come to see him (his small but choice cellar was laid in by Dr Macvino); the great library of the cathedral is within a few paces of his door, where he is treated by the librarian with more deference than the bishop himself; and when he needs change he goes down to the Heronry. Time softens the acuteness of his disappointment in love, and the recollection of it now brings a not unpleasant sadness.

Poor old Josey!—after all, perhaps the most lovable and respectable of our *dramatis personæ*—more so, at least, than our heroes, whose more discursive natures included some corners which they would pro-

bably have been unwilling that even their wives should pry into ; whereas Josiah's heart might have been turned page by page ; and, while much might have been found to interest, there would have been little to correct, and nothing to blot. But somehow or other, women do not seem always to give such unobtrusive merits the highest place in their affections. Orelia and Lady Lee were, as we have seen, among the number ; and many young ladies will, we doubt not, understand and sympathise with their errors of judgment.

A day or two after Rosa's marriage, Hester got a letter from Orelia. " Mine is a girl too," she said, " and I've set my heart on her marrying Julius when they are of a proper age. You must promise to forward the project, Hester." And as young persons invariably allow their parents to choose for them on these points, and never presume to form any counter predilections of their own, there is, of course, every prospect that Orelia's desire will be gratified.

Major Tindal did not easily forgive Orelia's marriage, nor forget his own discomfiture. He remains a sporting, hard-riding bachelor ; and when one of his acquaintances marries, he affects to pity him. " Poor devil !" he says, " I'll write and condole with him."

Mr Seager, coming out of jail at the end of two years, found himself without money, friends, or character. He could not, of course, resume his old position ; but Seager was not proud, and fitted himself with admirable facility to a new one. He started in the thimble-rig line, that being a profession requiring little other capital than dexterity and a knowledge of human nature under its more credulous and pigeonable aspect. He augments the income derived from this source by that which he earns as a racing prophet. He advertises that he, Seager, is the only man who can foretell the winners of all the great events ; asserts that he has hitherto been infallible ; and professes his readiness to let correspondents enjoy a lucrative peep into the future, on their enclosing a specified number of postage stamps. From such shifts as these he ekes out a living.

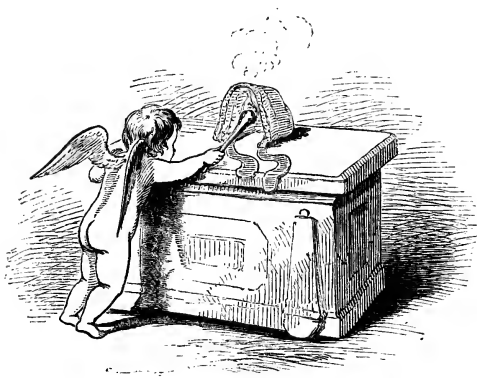
Bagot could not have lived so ; and is better as he is, sleeping under his foreign turf. In the grave he preserves a kind of incognito, and when called upon to answer for his deeds, may certainly plead a misnomer ; for the French stone-mason who carved his unpretending tombstone, taking the name of the deceased from dictation, Gallicised it, and inscribed on the monument "*Ci-gît Monsieur le Colonel Bagote-Lys.*"

Another marriage had been celebrated in Lanscote Church a short time before Rosa's. Jennifer Greene had brought her arts and experience to bear with more effect on Squire Dubbley than on the Curate. The thoroughly subjugated Squire, after being compelled to see all the females of his establishment, under fifty years of age, replaced by the most withered frumps to be found in those parts, had yielded to his fate. His adviser, Mr Randy, had been previously disposed of.

Jennifer had no sooner established her ascendancy, than she proceeded to exert it in the expulsion of Mr Randy. Thus alone in power, she was not long in convincing the Squire that she was quite necessary to his existence, and his sole defence against a horde of plunderers. The Squire, moreover, was impressed by the good looks of the housekeeper, to which the Curate had been so insensible; and the grand attack, which had only harassed Josiah, had laid the unprotected Squire at her feet.

Lady Lee, I am loth to lose you! Not with this page will your form pass rustling out of sight. But, reader, her independent life has ceased—her thoughts are now centred in the career of another—and a chronicle of her deeds and aspirations would be a mere repetition of, to you, humdrum happiness. Her

restlessness, and discontent, and languor are no more; she has lost even the memory of these since the event which, like this last sentence of my last chapter, has put a period to LADY LEE'S WIDOWHOOD.



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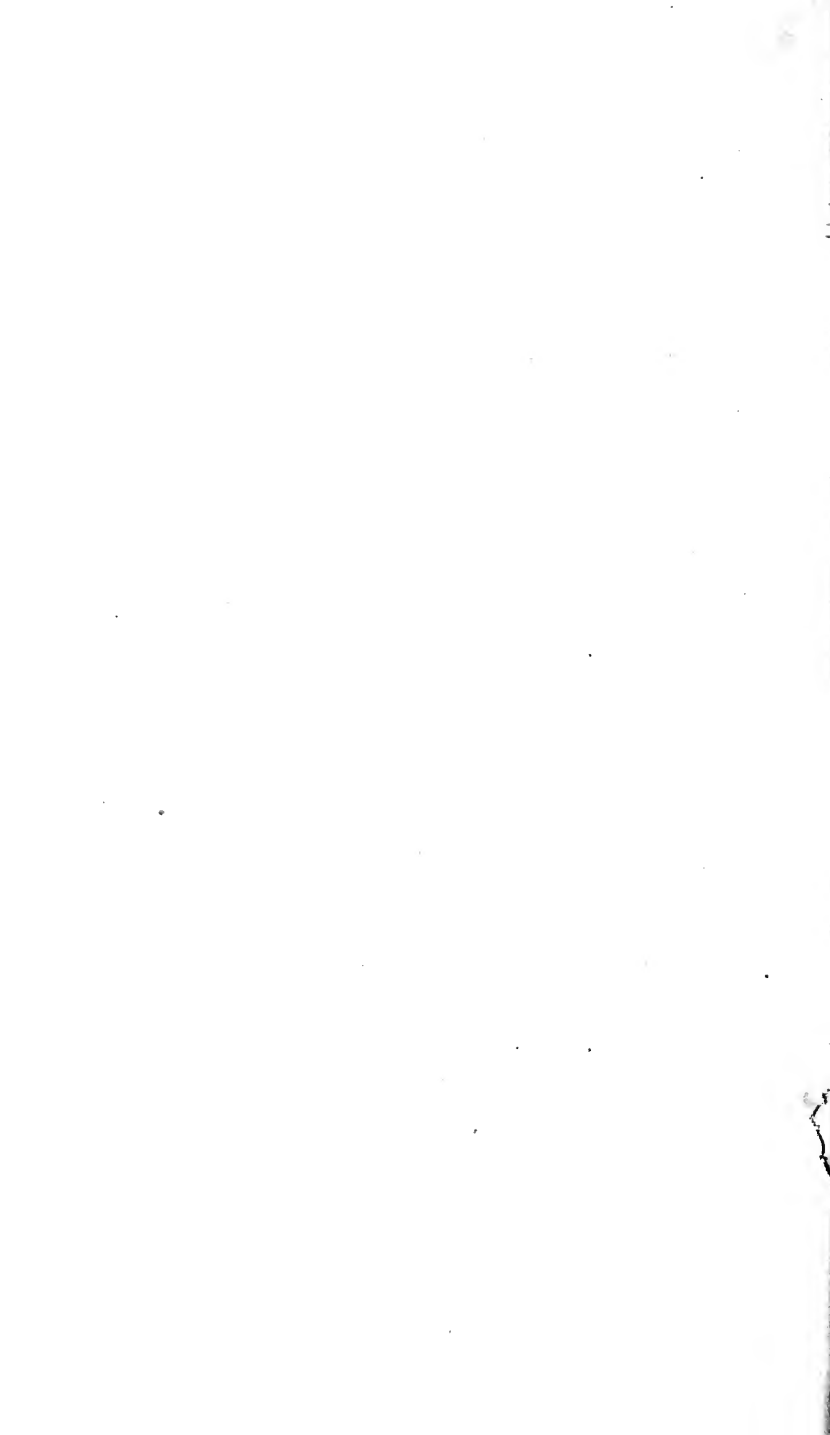
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